

BEFORE THE STORM



I. M. MAISKY

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RECOLLECTIONS

By

I. M. MAISKY

(Formerly Soviet Ambassador in London)

Translated from the Russian

by

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Dedicated to
ELIZABETH TCHEMODANOV



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PREFACE

THIS LITTLE BOOK was written during the winter of 1939-40 in London, where at that time I was the Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. That winter the war had not yet begun in earnest. The whole of Great Britain, however, was already being plunged after sunset into the pitch darkness of the black-out. The ordinary evening life, which always takes up so much of an ambassador's time, suddenly came to an end. This led to an unexpected void in the day which had hitherto been filled with all kinds of business and duties. I had always had strong literary inclinations, and I now felt myself drawn involuntarily to the writing-table. The result was these memoirs, embracing the first period of my life up to the time when I entered the university.

I have always considered that memoirs only have a real value when they are sincere and truthful. In this connection I have in mind not so much those conscious distortions of the truth, which merit condemnation in any work in the nature of memoirs, as something altogether different.

Two principal dangers lie in wait for the author of memoirs. The first is too much confidence in one's memory. The human memory is an imperfect instrument: it arbitrarily retains some facts and moments and drops others, which are often no less important. This, of course, is bound to affect the character of the picture that has fixed itself in the memory. The second danger is the tendency to look at the phenomena of the past, not infrequently the remote past, with the eyes of the present, and to portray the events of the past not as they were perceived by the author at the time when they took place, but as they would now be perceived by the author after a lapse of many years. If the writer of memoirs is insufficiently armed for the struggle against both these dangers, he may easily fall into an involuntary distortion of the truth, which is no less harmful than conscious falsification.

In writing my memoirs I happened to be in a more fortunate position than the majority of writers of memoirs describing their childhood and early youth. As a boy I was fond of keeping a diary and corresponding with relations and friends. By some whimsical chance a considerable part of these 'human documents' escaped destruction and came into my hands a few years ago. Particularly valuable were the letters which from the age of eight I systematically wrote to my cousin, E. M. Tchemadanova, and in which I described in detail the daily happenings

of my life and my reactions to everything I happened to read, see, hear or observe. Thus I had at my disposal precise and various material regarding my past, material which is not founded on the unreliable notes of one's own memory, but on the original documents relating to the period in question. This was a great help to me in my endeavours to avoid the pitfalls that threaten every writer of memoirs.

I do not know if my memoirs will satisfy my British reader and give him a clearer idea of how the people of the generation to whose lot fell the great honour of creating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, grew up and shaped themselves in Russia. I can, however, say one thing quite definitely: in the following pages I have endeavoured to describe with the utmost sincerity and truthfulness what took place and how it took place.

THE AUTHOR.

September, 1943.

CHAPTER ONE

First Impressions

THE HOT SOUTHERN sun is shining with a dazzling light. It seems to reign in the bright blue sky, and from it fall tempestuous cascades of bright warm rays. The blue sea is sparkling. Not a breath of wind. Everywhere—stillness and brilliance. Somewhere in the distance a lone sail gleams white. At the foot of the red clay cliffs a lazy, caressing wave gently laps the shore.

A man with a shaggy black beard and kind grey eyes picks me up in his arms and runs with me into the water. I am terrified. I clutch the man's neck convulsively with my soft little hands and scream out loud. But the man is inexorable. He only presses me more firmly to his breast and, sending up showers of silvery spray, goes farther and deeper into the water. I begin to struggle desperately in his arms. He laughs, plays about in the water and tries to soothe me:

"Come on, Vanichka. . . . Come on, silly. . . . Don't be afraid. I'm with you."

Suddenly the man makes a strange and unexpected movement: he squeezes my nose tightly, springs up and then suddenly dips down into the water with me. I feel I am suffocating. A mortal dread strikes right through the whole of my little being. An irrepressible shriek of terror tears itself from my constricted breast. But before I can give vent to it, I am out of the water again, and again I see the sun, the sea and the beach, where my mother is standing and waving her hand to me.

"That's enough! That's enough!" she calls out to the man. "Don't you see Vanichka is frightened?"

The man releases my nose and, sending up more showers of silvery spray, runs quickly through the water, this time in the opposite direction. A few moments later he hands me over to the arms of my mother, saying cheerfully: "Don't be a coward, Vanichka! You're a boy. . . . Shall we go into the sea again?"

But I am in no mood for the sea. I clutch my mother's neck and cry on her shoulder with relief. . . .

This is the first impression of existence that my memory has retained.

My mother told me later on that this incident happened in the year 1886, when I was two years old. We were spending the summer on the estuary of the Dnieper not far from Odessa, and my uncle—the husband of my mother's eldest sister—liked taking me down to the sea to bathe.

* * * * *

After this there is a dark gap. For a long time there is not a dot or a line on the photographic film of my memory. Darkness. Then suddenly there is a magnesium flash. A new picture is recorded. . . .

It is the picture of a small kitchen with a stove, cooking-range, wooden table, pots and plates. In the middle of the kitchen, on two chairs stands a child's metal bath. I am sitting in the bath, and opposite me in the same bath sits a merry dark-eyed little girl. A handsome young woman in an apron is washing the pair of us. Her rich dark hair is disarranged and sticks to her forehead. She is hot, and her kind, lively eyes are now smiling and now trying to look angry. The little girl and I wriggle about in the bath, playing about with the water and splashing it over one another. The water also splashes the young woman. We are hindering her from washing us.

"Stop playing about!" she shouts at me, and pretending to look cross she gives me a gentle slap on the hand.

But I do not believe that she is really angry. I laugh loudly, and mischievously slap the water hard with my hand. The little girl follows my example. Whereupon the young woman turns on the little girl with pretended sternness:

"What are you up to? Do you want me to smack you?"

But the girl only bursts out laughing. She knows that nobody is going to smack her.

For a minute or two longer we play about in the bath and then the young woman takes us out, rubs us down with a towel and gives us our clothes. A few minutes later the little girl and I are sitting side by side at the table, drinking hot milk and eating some very tasty buns. . . .

It is already 1888. I am four years old. My father has just finished his course at the Army Medical Academy and is going to Siberia to work off his stipend. We are on our way to Omsk, and have stopped in Moscow for a few days to pay a visit to our relations the Tchemodanovs. The young woman in the apron is my aunt, my mother's younger sister, and the little dark-eyed girl, sitting opposite me in the bath, is my cousin 'Birdie', who was to play such an important part in my childhood and early youth.

* * * * *

After this there is another gap in my memory. Darkness again. Then another magnesium flash and another picture. . . .

It is early spring. Easter. We are living in a new wooden house overlooking a wide square. On the opposite side of the square there are some official-looking white stone buildings. It is the hospital of the local military command. My father goes there every morning "to doctor the soldiers", as our cook, fat-legged Aksiusha, expresses it. Before he goes out my father always puts on high leather boots. And with good reason! The mud in the square in front of our house is absolutely amazing. It is not so much mud as a whole sea of mud; you could swim in it if you cared to risk your life. Now I am standing at the window, looking out into the centre of the square where the dark body of a cart lies miserably and somehow reproachfully buried in the mud. Two days ago, when this cart met with an accident, there was a lot of noise and shouting and a crowd of people, each of whom was giving advice about how best to get the cart out of the mud, but nothing

practical resulted from all the commotion. The horses were unharnessed, the owners were dragged out of the mud with ropes, and the cart was abandoned till the time when the square would dry up. My father has to be very careful. He always picks his way along the edge of the square where it is drier, skirting the main ponds, and yet he comes home every day with his boots covered in mud right up to the top. I stand gazing and thinking: "If I were Tsar Saltan, I'd give orders that there should be no mud."

However, to-day I am only idly pondering like this about the mud. Actually my mind is occupied with something else. During the whole of the previous month there has been unusual gaiety and commotion in our house. My mother has organized a local amateur dramatic circle. They have decided to perform the play *Sorvanetz* (*The Mad-cap*). The rôles have been settled, rehearsals held and the excitement has begun. The actors met in turn in the houses of the members of the circle, but more often at our house. Somehow it was more cosy and cheerful. It was said that "the porridge was buried" in our house,¹ and for this reason people liked going there better than anywhere else. Of course, it was not a question of the 'porridge' but of my mother, who was always the life and soul of the party. It goes without saying that all this time I was unusually excited, fluttering round the actors, prompting the parts and handing the costumes and the make-up. And now to-day, the first day of the Easter holiday, the show itself is to take place in the District Assembly Rooms. . . . Will they take me to see it or not? . . . Oh, how important this is! It is the most important question in the world! I cannot imagine how now, at this hour, at this moment, there can be any other question more important than this.

Midday. The guests are beginning to arrive. On the table in the drawing-room there is an Easter spread that makes my mouth water: iced cakes, 'paskha' spiced with almonds, coloured eggs of various hues, salmon, caviare, pasties, turkey, vodka, wines, liqueurs, etc., etc., etc. The guests exchange Easter greetings, kiss and embrace one another, eat, drink, chatter, relate the gossip of the town, criticize their acquaintances and, above everything else, talk about the forthcoming evening performance. I look on and listen, hover about the table, popping in and out among the guests, but all the time the question hammers in my head: "Will they take me or not?"

The night before I had accidentally heard my mother say to my father that the show would end at a late hour and that it would be better for me to stay at home with Aksusha. Would they really leave me? No; impossible! Nevertheless the question remains: "Will they take me or not?"

My mother is having a busy time, joking and laughing with all the guests. A cheerful young woman with a suggestion of a moustache on her lip goes up to her. She is the wife of the director of the district school and for some reason everybody calls her Katya. Katya is also taking part in the show, and during the rehearsals she always made a fuss of me.

¹ A Siberian expression.

Stroking my head, she turns to my mother and asks: "Is Vanichka coming to the show?"

I feel my heart go pit-a-pat. Mother starts talking about hygiene and late hours, but Katya merely shrugs her shoulders and says laughing: "Get away with your hygiene! We only live once. . . . You can see the boy is dying to go to the show, but you won't let him. . . . It's a shame!"

Katya again strokes my head and I feel ready to burst into tears. Mother looks at my face, realizes what is going on inside me, and gives her consent. I am so happy that I dance round the table for joy. I'm going to the show! . . .

I remember all this as though it had happened only yesterday. But, strange to relate, my memory has failed to retain the faintest recollection of the show itself, to which I was so anxious to go. . . .

It is the year 1889. I am six years old. I can already read and write a little. My father is working off his stipend in the remote little town of Kainsk in the province of Tomsk. My mother is occupied with the family, the management of the household, and social work—in so far as the limitations of the times permitted.

There is now another gap in my memory. Darkness again. But from the age of seven or eight my recollections become more connected and systematic. The picture of my childhood stands out. And as, for a child, the first and most important hub of his universe—at least in the pre-Socialist era—is the family, I will begin this account of my life with a description of the characters of my parents!

CHAPTER TWO

My Father

AN EARLY MORNING in winter. Outside it is still almost dark. The sky is only just beginning to get light. All is quiet in the street. It is so warm and cosy in bed. Curled up in a ball under the blankets, I want so much to stay snug for a little while longer . . . only just a little while longer. But no! It's impossible! It's half-past seven and I've got to get up, otherwise I'll be late for the secondary school.

Unwillingly I get out of bed. It takes me a long time to get into my little trousers. Then I spend a long time washing myself at the painted iron wash-stand, lazily splashing the water in the basin. At last I'm all ready: dressed, shod and washed. My school books are packed in my satchel. I go along to the dining-room to have tea, but

on the way I slip into my father's study. He is already up, or rather, sitting down. Every morning I find him in the same place and in the same posture, sitting over his microscope at a table which is covered with all kinds of retorts, test tubes, jars and paraphernalia.

"Good morning, Papa."

"Good morning, Vanichka."

And keeping one eye on the microscope, Father looks at me affectionately with the other.

"Have you been here long?" I ask him.

"No, not so very long. . . . A couple of hours."

That means that Father got up at six o'clock in the morning when it was still dark night outside and our flat was filled with the snores and sighs of sleeping people. I fondle Father and try to persuade him to come and have tea with us.

"Go, go, Vanichka," he says. "Drink your tea, otherwise you'll be late. I'm coming presently."

This 'presently' lasts at least half an hour. Mother manages to give all the children their breakfast, makes all the arrangements with the cook for dinner and instruct Semyon, the orderly, to make the necessary purchases in the town (as an army doctor, Father was entitled to an orderly), before Father at last appears in the dining-room.

"There you are—late again!" Mother scolds him. "Everything has got cold: the samovar and the shanezhki (hot scones). Whenever will you begin to live like a human being?"

"Don't worry, I manage all right as it is," says Father in a guilty tone, and quickly drinks his tea and eats his half-cold shanezhki.

I watch Father mechanically chewing his food with his strong, sound teeth, but I can see that his thoughts at this moment are far away from the breakfast table. I know where his thoughts are. They are fixed on what he was looking at a few minutes ago through his microscope. . . .

Whenever I think of my father the picture I have just described always comes into my mind. It is typical. More than that, it is characteristic. It expresses clearly the very essence of my father's nature, his best inner self—devotion to science. This devotion was the core of his being. Science had always been, and remained right up to the last day of his life, his 'god', to which he devoted his strength, his time and his energy, and for which he would have sacrificed his very life. Father was made of the same stuff as the martyrs of science in the past. Living in an age when the pioneers of science were no longer burnt at the stake, he was able to serve his 'god' in more peaceful and normal circumstances. But father's scientific path was far from being strewn with roses. More than once he encountered sharp thorns; later on I will relate in detail an incident of this kind.

I do not know where my father got this all-absorbing passion for science. He must have had a natural bent for it because neither his origin nor his education, nor the circumstances of his life could have helped to develop in him any inclination he may have had for scientific work. On the contrary, they were more likely to stifle any such tendencies.

My father came of a peasant family in the province of Kherson. At the age of nine he was left an orphan without father or mother. He was then adopted by an uncle, who lived 'in town' and was employed as a porter at the boys' grammar-school at Kherson. This uncle was a harsh-tempered man and the poor orphan did not have an easy life with him, but he had one good characteristic: he worshipped education. Being illiterate himself, he believed in the saying: "Education is light, lack of education is darkness." He constantly repeated this—not always apropos—and was firmly resolved to make something out of little Misha. By hook and by crook he got his nephew into the grammar-school where he was employed, and supported him during his first years of study. The uncle then died; my father, at the age of fourteen, was left all alone in the world and had to fend for himself. With the paltry sums he obtained by giving lessons, coaching pupils and doing all kinds of odd jobs, he just managed to finish school, after which he entered the faculty of physics and mathematics in the Novorossisk University at Odessa. This was at the end of the 'seventies, when more and more of the 'lower orders'—the children of priests, petty bourgeois and peasants—began entering the Russian universities. In 1882 father graduated from the university with the degree of 'candidate in natural sciences' and shortly afterwards he married my mother. It might have been expected that he would now finish with the sciences, enter some profession and set about establishing his 'family nest'. This was what thousands of others did, and my father was expected to do the same. But it turned out otherwise. This was due to that passion for science which constituted the mainspring of his soul.

While he was still a student in the faculty of physics and mathematics, my father heard one day from a comrade, a medical student, that smoking was very bad for the human organism. The medical student put forward a number of arguments in support of his view. My father, who was a heavy smoker in those days, took a deep interest in his colleague's statement. Not caring, however, for second or third hand information, he decided to investigate the problem himself. Although the influence of nicotine on the human organism formed no part of the programme of studies of the faculty of physics and mathematics, my father, snatching precious time from his own immediate studies and his feverish pursuit of a living, set about an independent investigation into harmful effects of smoking. And what an investigation it was too! He not only read all the relevant scientific works he could find in the university library, but also began to carry out various experiments on himself. One of these experiments was to observe the influence of running on the temperature of the human body. I cannot say what relation this experiment had to the basic theme of his research, but I know that every day, at precisely the same hour, my father took his own temperature and then ran for fifteen minutes without stopping, after which he took his temperature again. At the time in question he was living in a poor quarter on the outskirts of Odessa. He had to carry out his experiment either in the yard of the house where he rented a tiny room, or in the street. One can easily imagine the sensation it caused among the local inhabitants. Scores of people—

men, women and children—collected every day to watch ‘the running student’. The urchins were particularly enthusiastic. When my father was about to begin his experiment, all sorts of spirited exclamations came from the crowd:

“Tighten up your belly-band, or you’ll fall down.”

“Turn like a wheel—trot like a horse.”

“Don’t lose your trousers. They’re coming down.”

“Where are you hurrying to? You’ll wear your boots out.”

And so they kept on. In the end the whole district came to the conclusion that the student was ‘a bit dotty’, but this only served to increase the number of spectators of father’s experiment. All this noise, however, did not embarrass the young investigator in the least. He continued methodically to study the question in which he was interested, and when he finished his work he expounded his results in a scientific paper which he read before an assembly of the professors and students. His conclusions were quite definite: nicotine has a harmful effect on the human organism, and smoking is an evil that must be combated. My father did not confine himself to theory alone: the day after his paper he gave up smoking and never touched a cigarette again to the end of his life.

This episode played an important part in my father’s destiny. Natural science ceased to interest him and he felt attracted to medicine. On finishing the faculty of physics and mathematics he was faced with the question of what he was to do next.

For a while he was unable to make up his mind. He had only just got married. Children might be expected in the next few years. He hadn’t a copeck in his pocket. To enter the faculty of medicine meant another five years of study. Was it worth it? Had he the right to doom his wife and children to want and privation? Would it not be better to say good-bye to the allurements of science? Would it not be simpler to get work at once and provide for his family?

Thousands of young men in my father’s position would probably have chosen in favour of the family and security. But my father acted differently: he decided to become a doctor whatever happened. However, he did not enter the faculty of medicine of Novorossisk University, where he would have been obliged to depend entirely upon himself financially, but went to the Army Medical Academy in St. Petersburg, where he could receive a stipend. True, in return for this stipend he committed himself to serve, at the end of his course, four years and nine months in any place at the discretion of the War Office, but for the time being the financial problem was to some extent solved.

I say to some extent, because the stipend was obviously insufficient for two. In St. Petersburg my parents had a hard life: they lived in cold attics and were half-starved. Matters became even worse when children began to arrive: first myself and two years later my sister Julia. When my mother became pregnant with me, the situation was so critical that Father was compelled to interrupt his studies and take a post as ‘tutor’ to a dunce in a nobleman’s family in the province of Novgorod. It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good. Indeed, the year which my parents spent in the country was undoubtedly my salvation. Here on

an old Russian estate, in surroundings of fresh air, quiet and good living, my mother bore me and gave me birth, having provided me for my journey through life with what was to be so useful in later years—good health and physical endurance.

In November, 1887 my father graduated from the Academy with the degree of physician ‘with honours’, and in the spring of the following year, 1888, he was sent to Siberia to work off his stipend. So began his career as an army doctor. In the course of the next seventeen years, living mainly at Omsk, he moved up the steps of the military bureaucratic ladder, first as junior medical officer of the 8th West-Siberian Battalion, then medical officer attached to various military missions, superintendent of the military hospital at Kainsk, superintendent of the military hospital at Tiumen, junior medical officer of the Siberian Cadet Corps, and house-physician at the Omsk military hospital. In 1905 he was transferred to Moscow in the capacity of junior medical officer—at first in the Cadet Corps. Later on he became junior medical officer at the Alexeyev Military School. Here, in 1913, he completed twenty-five years of service and intended to retire in order to devote himself entirely to science, but the First World War broke out: the revolution came, followed by the civil war and intervention. All my father’s plans and calculations were upset. For six years he was at the front—at first in the old army and then in the Red Army. He went through all the campaigns with the Red Army and was demobilized only in 1921.

Such a life was not calculated to incline one to scientific work. Where, indeed, was the time for it? In all this period of almost thirty-five years there were only two years when my father had the opportunity to get away from the daily grind of service life. This was in 1893–95 when he was sent to St. Petersburg to take a post-graduate course. But this was an exception. Moreover, he had a large family of five children, whose ‘daily bread’ he had constantly to provide. Furthermore, there were his service duties which took up a great deal of time and energy. In addition to all this, there was the life in small outlandish places where people are so easily sucked into the swamp of Philistinism, drink, and gambling. One may well ask: how could he find time for science in such circumstances?

Nevertheless, my father did manage to keep up his scientific studies, and very seriously at that. The objects of his study changed, but science remained. To it he gave up all his free time—the early morning before going to work, the late evening after work, holidays, the time when he was on leave and even when he was ill. Science was his passion, his ‘secret’ love. I say ‘secret’, because in those days it was not altogether expedient to show too great an interest in knowledge. It was just the kind of thing to get you suspected of ‘unreliability’, with all the consequences that this entailed.

How my father contrived to study science under any circumstances is well illustrated by the following incident.

At the end of the last century the ideas of Lombroso, the well-known Italian criminologist, enjoyed great popularity in Europe and Russia. Lombroso made a study of crime and came to the conclusion that its cause was not rooted in social-economic conditions, but in physiology.

On the basis of a whole series of 'facts' and 'measurements' he proved that criminals were not made but born. According to him there were 'criminal types', born as such from their mothers' wombs. Their external peculiarity was supposed to be their 'criminal skulls', distinguished from 'normal skulls' by their shape and dimensions. Lombroso's followers asserted that these congenital criminals even had special 'bumps' on their heads, and that from these bumps it was possible infallibly to determine that a given individual was bound to become a thief or a murderer. No matter what conditions you placed him in or how you educated him, it was all of no avail. He was destined to be a criminal from birth.

Of course, Lombroso's theory was taken up enthusiastically by all the reactionary forces of the period. It was acclaimed as the height of scientific wisdom and extolled in books, journals, and newspapers. My father, who had always followed the development of European scientific thought, also took an interest in Lombroso's ideas. However, true to his principle of not taking anything on trust, he decided himself to test the ideas of the fashionable Italian criminologist. In the summer of 1896 he was detailed to accompany a convict barge, in which from year to year convicts on their way from European Russia to Siberia were conveyed between Tiumen and Tomsk. An officer with a military escort and a doctor for medical assistance during the journey were required to be on board the barge. The barge went from Tiumen to Tomsk and back during the whole of the summer and managed to transport no less than a thousand convicts in a season. This was a splendid opportunity for my father to put Lombroso's theory to the test. And that is what he did. With the aid of special instruments, which he had had made in a locksmith and joiner's workshop in Omsk, he measured the skulls of nearly a thousand convicts transported on the barge during the summer. It was very tiring and complicated work. The escort officer made fun of my father all the time and would often come into his cabin and chaff him.

"Well, Mikhail Ivanovich, have you found your 'bumps'? Eh? Well, what about them? Are they tasty? What do they smell like?"

Then turning half-round and twirling his moustache, he said. "You'd better come along to my place . . . we'll have a drink. Stepka-the-scoundrel" (this was what he called his orderly) "has managed to get hold of some amazing sturgeon . . . ama . . . a . . . zing! Simply melts in your mouth! . . . Afterwards we'll play for small stakes . . . eh? Come on, leave these 'killers' of yours."

But my father did not leave his 'killers', and doggedly persevered with his researches. At the end of the summer he summed up his results and the conclusion he arrived at was fatal to the fashionable criminologist. Lombroso's theory was not confirmed by the facts of my father's investigation. It had obviously come out of the blue. My father prepared a corresponding report and on returning home read it at a meeting of the Omsk doctors. The result was a great rumpus. Most of his colleagues were shocked and the senior army medical inspector, who was an ardent admirer of Lombroso, flew into such a rage that he nearly had an apoplectic

stroke. He started a rumour in the town that my father was a 'sedition-monger' and that he was 'bringing disgrace on the army uniform'. Moreover, the inspector resolved to get rid of my father. There began to drop, as though from a horn of plenty, all sorts of chicanery, fault-finding, reprimands, and difficult and unprofitable appointments. At one time there was even a question of his retirement. My father fully realized what it meant to engage honourably in scientific work under the conditions of Tsarist Russia. Fortunately, after a while the apoplectic medical inspector was transferred to some other place, and the persecutions to which my father was subjected gradually ceased.

It was only in our Soviet times that my father was at last enabled to devote himself entirely to scientific work. From the time of his demobilization and right up to his death, in June, 1938, that is to say, for seventeen years, moving from one place to another, he worked uninterruptedly in various institutes and laboratories. And how he worked!

I get up at five o'clock in the morning, he wrote to me in the spring of 1932 from the Urals. Till nine o'clock I work on my own researches. From nine to six in the evening I deal with the routine business of the laboratory. Then I have dinner and lie down to rest for an hour or two, after which I go on with my researches till 11-12. I go to bed about twelve. I carry on with my scientific work on rest-days as well. This way of living does not burden me in any way, and I do not feel any special fatigue. Every addition to my scientific equipment fully compensates for all the difficulties and troubles I encountered in my path of hard and painstaking work. The sphere of research grows ever larger and new problems arise, which lure me farther and farther like a constantly retreating beacon.

In another letter, relating to the same period, he told me that he was on holiday at Birsik, and added:

I have nearly finished looking through all the archives of the hospital here and have found plenty of clinical data to confirm my conclusions.

In another letter he remarked with satisfaction that his work on the subject of hereditary malaria had been published in a certain journal, and he added the following brief but significant observation:

It is a comparatively small work, but I had to put in two years of persistent slogging at it.

There speaks my father. He had worked, of course, on the original sources, just as he had done on the convict barge.

If one takes into account the fact that the man who lived and worked like this was well over seventy, one can only marvel at his health, energy, and inexhaustible enthusiasm for science.

Yes, my father's ruling principle was his devotion to science. But he was not absolutely aloof from public life. Admittedly, he was never a politician. He was always a little frightened by this field. He did not feel at ease in it. However, while not acknowledging any strictly defined political programme, from his early youth he marched in the ranks of the advanced social movement. In his student days he adhered to the Narodnik ('Populist') trend, although he was never an active Narodnik. My mother told me more than once, with a smile, that when my father used to visit her in his courting days he would read to her



MY FATHER

the works of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky in a monotonous voice for hours on end. Mother was bored to death, but my father considered this was the most 'intellectual' way of expressing love. However, the leaders of the Narodniks did not prevent them from getting married and creating an affectionate, united family. Later on, in St. Petersburg and Siberia, my father's Narodnik enthusiasms faded away, but he always remained a sincere democrat, an opponent of Tsarism and a free-thinking scientific rationalist. He did not recognize religion, and there were never any ikons, lamps or consecrated bread in our home. All our family was brought up in an atmosphere of atheism, although officially, of course, we were considered to be Orthodox (the status of being without a religion was not recognized in Russia in those days), and as such we were obliged to conform to certain religious formalities. True, neither Father nor Mother ever went to church nor confessed nor took communion in Passion Week, but as a schoolboy I was obliged to learn the catechism in class, to attend Vespers on Saturdays and Mass on Sundays, and to go to confession without fail before Easter. Any deviation from this ritual led to repressive action on the part of the school authorities. This took the form of a lower mark for behaviour, scoldings, and reprimands, and in some cases even expulsion from the school. Hence, whether I liked it or not, I was compelled to conform to the régime that existed in those days.

My father's personal conduct was irreproachable; perhaps he was even too rigorous and stern. He was scrupulously honest and never chased after private practice or money. He did not intrigue against his colleagues, he was not servile and did not resort to chicanery and denunciations. He did not drink, play cards, dance, or pay attentions to women. Smoking, as I have already mentioned, he gave up in his early youth. Even when there was an opportunity, he seldom went to the theatre, saying that he had no time. On the other hand, he played the violin, and during the first years of his life in Siberia was much attached to it. On his insistence, in my childhood, I, too, began to learn to play the violin, but my heart was not in it and I gave up my music when I left school. Quiet, even-tempered, reserved, always engrossed in his own mysterious thoughts, my father hated idle talk and recognized only deeds. How often as a child I heard him exclaim about somebody: "He's a phrasemonger!"

This was the height of contempt and disapproval. He pronounced his verdict in a tone of annihilation, as though he were cutting the man's head off.

Of course, an army doctor of his type was not likely to be 'in good odour' with the authorities. And my father was certainly not 'in good odour'. He was altogether out of place in this little drunken Siberian province and in the enormous military-bureaucratic machine of Tsarist Russia. He was constantly passed over, forgotten, ignored, intrigued against and generally pushed on one side as much as possible. It was no accident that right up to the end of his twenty-five-years' service, he never rose above the rank of 'junior medical officer' and 'collegiate councillor' in spite of his being a doctor of medicine. Indeed, it could hardly be wondered at. The Tsarist régime sensed

that it had to do with an enemy and paid him in the coin with which enemies are paid.

Sometimes the relations between my father and the authorities went so far as open conflicts. I found among his papers a curious correspondence between him and the director of the Moscow Cadet Corps relating to the end of 1905. My father, who was junior medical officer of the Corps at that time, was in charge of the Corps hospital for infectious diseases and treated the patients very humanely. Above all, he did not prevent the cadets from discussing political subjects and expressing sympathy for the revolutionary movement. The Director of the Corps, General Lobachevsky, was highly indignant at the 'junior medical officer's' conduct, and on 6th December, 1905, sent him a threatening communication, in which he indignantly declared that 'it was intolerable to allow the cadets to sing the *Marseillaise*', and demanded that my father should take steps to put an end to such 'disgraceful scenes'. The next day my father replied to the General with a report, in which he stated that his duties as a doctor consisted in his giving medical attention to the sick cadets and not in occupying himself with their political education. The Corps Director was absolutely furious and on 16th December sent my father a second letter, commanding him again to 'restore order' in the hospital and adding in conclusion:

In the meantime, being in absolute disagreement with your views regarding the duties of a doctor in the Cadet Corps, I am forwarding my orders of 6th December and your report of 7th December to the District Army Medical Inspector.

The outcome of this conflict was that my father was obliged to leave the Cadet Corps.

His inherent progressiveness was never more clearly shown than in his attitude towards the October Revolution. He was nearly sixty years old when the Soviet régime was firmly established in our country. His age, traditions, and acquired habits, all seemed bound to make him feel suspicious of, and even hostile to the new régime, which was without precedent in history. Actually, however, it turned out otherwise. It is true that at the very beginning—at the end of 1917 and in the early months of 1918—he was perplexed and baffled by all that was happening. He did not fully realize what was happening, who the Bolsheviks were, what they wanted and what aims they had set themselves. However, there was no malice or hostility whatsoever in my father's questionings and perplexities. Quite the contrary. He only remained faithful to himself: he greeted the new hitherto unknown phenomenon and, in accordance with his customary scientific habit, wanted to investigate and study it before he arrived at any definite conclusions. He very soon felt sympathetic towards the Bolsheviks, although he did not always agree with them absolutely 100 per cent. In the main, however, he approved of their general line. He was particularly pleased that the Bolsheviks had completely liquidated the abominable, reactionary, putrid forces of the old régime, from which he himself had suffered so much during the whole of his life. It was quite natural that from the beginning of the civil war Father should willingly join the Red Army as a doctor and afterwards take deeper and firmer root in our new Soviet

life. True, he never joined the Party as long as he lived. Indeed, this could hardly be expected of such an old man, but in the last years of his life he undoubtedly became what we now call a 'non-Party Bolshevik'. I remember some time in the beginning of 1935 he wrote me a letter which deeply affected me.

I am following with the closest attention, he wrote, the progressive advance of our U.S.S.R. both at home and abroad. In the first place I am delighted with our successes in the form of investigation and research in positively all fields (plant-genetics, cattle-breeding, medicine, exploration of the Arctic regions, geology, etc.). The weight of the U.S.S.R. in the international arena is understandable because of the enormous progress made in industry and in all spheres of human activity; we have a well-equipped army with a fine spirit (not to be compared with the old Tsarist army); we are almost completely independent economically of capitalist countries. (We've got everything ourselves) And on top of all this the country is progressing at an unprecedented rate.

Such was the path which my father travelled after the October Revolution.

His death was sudden and in keeping with the pattern of his whole life. He was working at the time as the director of a laboratory in a factory near Moscow. Despite his seventy-eight years, he felt well and, as usual, was occupied with all sorts of scientific work and investigations. Shortly before his death he began a new research in which he was greatly interested—the effect of silver on bacteria. He also took part in the local public life. On the very day of his death Father went off as usual at seven o'clock in the morning to the laboratory, near which he lived. At ten o'clock in the morning he came home to breakfast, as usual. Having drunk a cup of tea and eaten a snack, he got up to go back to work, but suddenly turned pale and sank heavily into the chair. One of his eyes twitched slightly. He made another attempt to get up, but suddenly staggered and fell unconscious on the floor. Doctors were summoned. My brother, who was also a doctor, came hurriedly from Moscow. Everything known to science was tried to bring Father back to consciousness, but it was of no avail. His pulse was comparatively good up till midnight, but after that it fell rapidly. By one o'clock in the morning Father was no more. . . .

The funeral took place three days later. I happened to be on leave near Moscow at the time and went to pay my last respects to my dear old father. All our relations also came. Father was solemnly and affectionately accompanied on his last journey. The staff of the laboratory where he worked mourned him in the true sense of the word. The local District Board of Health and the District Committee of the Medical Workers' Trade Union defrayed the expenses of the funeral and gave it a public character. There was a civil memorial ceremony, at which a number of speakers said many good things about him as a doctor, scientist, and public figure. They held him up as an example and a shining model of a 'non-Party Bolshevik'. I also said a few words. There were wreaths. There were tears. There were touching farewells. What was most valuable in all this was the fact that you felt the sincerity of it.

Then the long procession accompanied the coffin to the grave. It was a warm, summer's day. The thick sand crunched underfoot. Clouds of dust floated in the air. The provincial orchestra played Chopin's *Funeral March*, not altogether in tune. I walked behind the coffin and thought: 'This is the end of a long and interesting life that was entirely devoted to science and, through science, to the people and humanity. Work, indefatigable, constant, disciplined work, that became second nature and even a delight, was the mainspring of that life. Death itself bowed before this all-conquering principle and came to Father on the field of work without his having been ill or unable to work for a single day. His life had a characteristic and harmonious end.'

CHAPTER THREE

My Mother

MY MOTHER WAS a different person altogether. In many respects she was the exact opposite of my father. In appearance, to begin with. Father was a tall, strong, broad-shouldered man with a certain tendency to stoutness in his later years. He had scarcely any hair on his head, having gone bald at the age of thirty-five. My mother, on the other hand, was small, dainty, with a mass of thick, slightly wavy chestnut hair, and lively greenish eyes.

There was no less difference in their characters. Father was a quiet, sedentary, reserved man—a typical phlegmatic. Mother, on the contrary, was of a choleric temperament—lively, inconsistent, quick-tempered, and talkative. She was fond of singing, and in her young days sang quite well. She liked dancing, enjoying herself, seeing people, and going out on visits. She had something unique in herself, a kind of charm, which attracted people to her and easily made her the centre of attention. She was always one to make friends, always 'the life and soul of the party'. She was a good housekeeper and managed everything and everybody. I cannot say that Father was henpecked by Mother (he always went his own way in matters that he considered important), but in family affairs he silently acknowledged the mother's 'hegemony' and scarcely ever interfered in them. And Mother availed herself extensively of this privilege. With the passing of the years the authoritarian trait in my mother's character grew stronger and at times developed into a form of 'parental despotism', especially in regard to the children. Indeed at one time when I was between the ages of fourteen and sixteen we quarrelled fairly often. However, when she realized she was unable to break my 'stubbornness', she beat a retreat, and after that our relations were always marked by mutual respect and warm affection.

In contrast to my father, who seemed to have been born for serious scientific work, my mother was extremely restless, inconsistent, and

hasty. She was never able to occupy herself with anything for long. Her mind was constantly jumping from one thing to the next, from one subject to another, at times in the most unexpected associations. This was particularly noticeable in her letters, and we children often made fun of her in a good-natured way by quoting some absolutely fantastic passages from them. Theories and abstractions of any kind she disliked. She was thoroughly matter-of-fact and practical, but she was not one of the lucky ones in life, and these qualities of hers never found the application they merited. Ever since she was a child it had been her dream to become a doctor, and I have no doubt that if her dream had been realized she would have become an excellent doctor with a wide reputation and a big practice. She was a very capable person all round, being able to grasp any idea in a moment, and she had what almost amounted to a passion for healing people. Circumstances, however, combined against her. Her father was a minor official and there was always very little money in the family. She was just able to finish school, but could not afford to go to a university. Nevertheless, her passion for medicine—not theoretical medicine, as with Father, but practical applied medicine—remained with her till the end of her life. She read medical books and took an interest in her husband's work. In the end she became an excellent self-taught doctor, and I well remember that during the whole of my childhood it was not Father but Mother who treated us when we had anything the matter with us. And excellent treatment she gave us. Father was called in only on the more serious occasions, and then only for consultation. Usually he merely assented to what Mother had done.

In her youth my mother also passed through a phase of enthusiasm for the ideas of the Narodnik ('Populist') movement. However, being a more active person than Father, she put these ideas into practice and went to live among the people and became a schoolmistress in one of the Ukrainian villages. It was during this period that my parents' love-affair began, but when my mother went to live in St. Petersburg, her connection 'with the land' came to an end. Nevertheless she always retained her interest in, and love of, teaching, and later on this proved very useful. She herself taught all us children to read and write, prepared us for entering school and coached us whenever necessary during our school-days.

When she married and her family began to appear, her interest in social movements faded even more quickly than was the case with my father. She underwent that metamorphosis which was characteristic of thousands and thousands of intellectual women in the pre-Revolution period: step by step, year by year, she withdrew more and more from political and social questions, and confined herself increasingly within the narrow framework of her family. Gradually the family became the centre of her world, the focus of all her interests, almost an object of worship with her. If the mainspring of my father's life was devotion to science, that of my mother's was devotion to her family. Her motto was: 'All for the family', and for its sake she was ready to face any inconvenience, any sacrifice, any suffering, even death. For it she spared neither time nor strength nor energy. She herself nursed

and brought up all us children—and there were five of us. She would recall with pride and deep satisfaction the time when any one of us was threatened with a serious illness and how she averted it by her zeal, perseverance, and maternal heroism. She was particularly fond of relating how I had scrofula very badly when I was between three and four years of age. I had ulcers and eczema all over my body. Every now and again my temperature went up. I was very naughty on account of the pain and Mother's endless anointings and bandagings. I did not want to eat anything, whereas good nourishment was one of the essential conditions of recovery.

"So I began to think what I could feed you with," Mother told me. "I made some little minced meat rissoles. You took them in your mouth and spat them out at once. Then I decided to try a little trick. I gave you the rissole together with some jam. At first everything seemed to be all right. You took the rissole with the jam, chewed it and swallowed it. I was delighted. Then what happened? When it was all finished, you suddenly began to pull the meat out from the side of your cheek. . . . You'd eaten the jam, and you'd kept the meat in your mouth. I nearly cried in my despair."

In general, my mother laid great stress on the physical training of children and tried to plan our whole life on up-to-date hygienic lines. Later in life I had more than one occasion to be grateful for this solicitude of hers.

They say that extremes meet. Our family might serve as an excellent illustration of this. In spite of the sharp contrasts in the temperaments and characters of my parents, in the course of years they somehow managed to adapt themselves and fit in with each other, and in the long run they established a strong, healthy, and united family. This does not mean, of course, that there were never any arguments and quarrels between them. Oh no! How many times as a boy did I witness scenes like the following.

It is supper time (For some reason or other most of the domestic conflicts took place at table.) All of us children are sitting in our places, greedily munching our food. Mother is pouring out the tea at the samovar and having something to say to each of us. At the other end of the table Father is silently swallowing one morsel after the other—he always had a good appetite—and thinking about something. Suddenly Mother begins: "You know, Mishka, we ought to go and see the Kuprianovs. We haven't been there for a long time. Yesterday I ran into Marya Petrovna in Shaninaya's shop. She wouldn't even look at me. She's evidently offended."

Kuprianov is the senior doctor of the hospital where Father works as house-physician, and maintains normal routine relations with him. The other doctors at the hospital simply toady to Kuprianov as the chief. There is nothing servile about Father and he dislikes wasting time on observing even the minimum of social etiquette. For this reason he tries to shake Mother off by muttering indefinitely: "Hm-m-m . . ."

But Mother refuses to take this for an answer.

"What's 'Hm-m-m'?" she says. "We must go! It's embarrassing. Why quarrel with people? Let's go on Thursday evening."



MY MOTHER

Chewing his cutlet, Father looks obstinately down at his plate and snaps back: "All right, go."

"What do you mean, 'go'?" Mother answers, beginning to get worked up, and realizing at once what Father is driving at. "What about you? I'm not going alone. Let's go together."

Father makes another attempt to get out of it.

"I can't go on Thursday," he says. "I'm in the middle of an experiment, and on Thursday evening I'm going to get the vaccine."

Mother flares up at once. The blood rushes to her cheeks and she goes for Father with all the passion of her fiery temper: "You're always like that! I've given up my life to you! I've sacrificed the best years of my youth! I never see the world, I work myself to death, I never get enough sleep, I sew and wash for everybody. . . And this is all the thanks I get! Vaccine is more important to him than his wife!"

The wild outburst goes on for quite a long time. Mother throws all Father's sins in his face: how on Sunday he didn't go with the family to Zagorodnaya Woods, but went to the laboratory instead, and how the day before yesterday he didn't forget to buy the guinea-pigs for his experiments, but forgot to fetch the cake that had been ordered at the pastry-cook's for my birthday, and how yesterday evening he sat up till two o'clock in the morning over his microscope and kept her awake, and a lot more in the same vein.

Father endures the attack with imperturbable calm and goes on eating one cutlet after another. The temperature of Mother's anger mounts higher and higher. Father's icy silence maddens her. At last she can stand it no longer: the tears flow from her eyes, she jumps up from the table and exclaiming: "No, I can't, I can't!" she runs into the bedroom. Father finishes his supper, gets up from the table and goes to his microscope. . .

The next day all is forgotten, and life goes back to normal again.

The basis of all these quarrels and conflicts was Mother's resentment of the fact that Father preferred science to the family and did not give enough attention to his wife and children. And in this she was certainly right. But as there was no question of any other woman, no cause for jealousy, and as Mother recognized in the depth of her heart that devotion to science was an excellent thing, her resentment was not very deep and did not cause any serious dissension in our family life. The quarrels were soon over and forgotten. There were no other sources of internal friction. Neither Father nor Mother had any outside interests. Father did not play cards and did not lose money. He never touched wine or spent nights on the spree. There was always a wholesome, bright, industrious atmosphere in the family. Father was occupied with his work and science. Mother did the house-keeping, made jam, shredded cabbage, pickled gherkins and carefully studied a thick cookery book by E. Molokhovetz, called *A Boon to Young Housewives*, which was very popular at that time. Being very resourceful by nature, she managed to support a family of seven on Father's comparatively modest salary (100-150 roubles a month), and even to find the means for long journeys in the summer—to the Urals, Moscow, etc. There was not the slightest hint of luxury in our life,

nor was there any poverty either. We had simple food, but it was wholesome and satisfying. Even to this day I prefer *shitchi* (cabbage soup) and *rissoles* to the most elaborate creations of the culinary art of Europe. Our clothes were modest but warm and comfortable. We sat on rough chairs and stools, but there was enough fresh air in the rooms.

I have already mentioned that there were five of us children—three boys and two girls. Our ages formed a ladder, the interval between the rungs being two years. I was the eldest, and the difference between me and my youngest brother Mikhail was eight years. Our house was always full of children with their romps and laughter and tears. We were a very friendly family, and our parents treated us all impartially—there were no favourites and no 'step-children'. However, the difference in ages was strongly marked. When I finished school, Mikhail had only just started the preparatory class, and my younger sister Valentina was still in the first class. My other brother Anatol, whom Nature had endowed with artistic talents, but who eventually became a doctor, was nearer my own age, and it was with him that I had most in common and with whom most of the games were played. But I was most intimate of all with Julia, the eldest of my two sisters, who was only two years younger than me. She was a delicate girl, but she was very thoughtful and had a gentle, considerate disposition. But she was not very practical and lacked the capacity to ward off the buffettings of life. These qualities left their mark on the later life of Yulenka, as we called her in the family. Yulenka and I were friends in my childhood, but later when I was nearing the end of my schooldays we read books together and discussed and shared each other's thoughts and feelings. However, I must say frankly that my brothers and sisters did not play, and have never played, a particularly important part in my life. When we were children there was too great a difference in our ages. And later on, when I left school and went out into the world, I saw very little of them: the conditions of revolutionary work in those days soon cut me off from my family.

To-day, when I think about my parents, more than anything else I am struck by the fact that in their origins, education, mental equipment and social and political outlook they were typical representatives of that special social category which is known in Russian history as 'the mixed intelligentsia' and which was destined to play such an outstanding part in the second half of last century. It was not without reason that my parents inspired me in my early youth with a love for such writers as Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shtchedrin, Dobroliubov and Pisarev. It was not for nothing that complete sets in beautiful bindings of the works of Heine, Schiller, Byron and Shakespeare stood on the dining-room book-shelf, or that when I was a boy Father gave me books like the biography of Galileo, the life of Giordano Bruno and lives of Stephenson and Fulton, or that in spite of his natural reserve he had long talks with me about Pasteur, Virchow and Helmholtz, and acquainted me with the rudiments of biology, medicine and physics. Finally, it was not in vain that my father so often took me with him on his journeys through Siberia, when he was sent on distant missions. He always

said that nothing develops a child so much as travel and getting to know new places, new people, new races and customs.

Undoubtedly my family had a strong and healthy influence on me. It helped to make me sound in mind and body, kept me free from prejudices, encouraged the qualities of perseverance and industry and awakened my interest in scientific and social thought. But perhaps the most important and valuable of all that my family gave me was the shining example of how a man's life can be devoted not to his own profit or family nor to his own individual welfare, but to a great and splendid idea. The example of my father exercised a very strong influence on the formation of my own character. And if, later, I too, was able to find a great and splendid ideal, to which I have devoted my whole life, then to a great extent I owe it to my father's inspiring example.

CHAPTER FOUR

Our Town

IF THE FAMILY is the first hub of the child's universe, the second hub is undoubtedly the place where he lives. I spent a great part of my early years in Omsk, and therefore, having described my family, I must draw, at least in general outline, a picture of Omsk as it was in the days of my boyhood.

Fifty years ago Omsk was a ghastly and terrible place. It was a remote provincial town, forsaken by God and man, of which it was said: "If you ride for three years, you'll never get there."

Indeed, until the coming of the Siberian Railway, the journey from Moscow to Omsk took nearly three weeks. And even later, when at last in the middle of the '90's the railway passed through Omsk, the journey still took at least a week.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a small fort, surrounded by walls and a moat, was built on the steep right bank of the Irtysh at its junction with the River Om. Later there grew up around the fort, along both banks of the River Om, a small township, which gradually spread out in all directions and eventually became the 'capital' of the West-Siberian Province. Omsk was situated in the very heart of the so-called Barabinsk steppe and was exposed to all the winds from the four corners of the earth. It was always windy there. In winter the town was buried in snowdrifts. In summer it was covered with clouds of stinging yellow dust. The climate was continental in the extreme: in June and July people and animals languished in the intolerable heat, while in December and January there were raging snowstorms and 40 degrees of frost.

In the days of my childhood only a few ruins recalled the military past of Omsk. The walls of the fort had tumbled down long ago; the ramparts were overgrown with grass and shrubs and there was not a drop of water in the moat. Some old rusty cannon, half buried with earth, jutted out here and there, and on the yellow painted gateway one could still distinguish the inscription, in large figures, '1796'. In my time, however, the fort had a different name. It was now called 'the citadel' and was crammed with barracks and various army institutions. The senior officers also lived in its old narrow streets. For this reason the word 'citadel' was spoken in the town with a certain respect, and if anyone said he was 'living in the citadel', he was regarded as a being of a higher order.

For us boys the 'citadel' had a special attraction. Its moat and ramparts, just opposite the boys' school, were the favourite place for our games and fights. As soon as the long interval began we used to rush there in order to stretch our limbs, cramped from sitting, by running about and fighting. We used to come here in our free time, especially in the spring, to play a game of 'merchants and bandits'. All the younger generation of the town would flock here when the traditional fights took place between the high-school boys and the Cadets of the Omsk Cadet Corps. Actually there was no reason whatsoever for these fights. But there was an age-old tradition that the Cadets and the high-school boys were two hostile camps. The Cadets teased the high-school boys with the nickname *Oslinaya Golova* (Ass's Head). This was how they interpreted the letters 'O.G.' (Omsk Gymnasia) engraved on the metal clasps of our belts. For their part the high-school boys teased the Cadets by calling out "Stuck-up Cadets." Usually both sides were infuriated by this exchange of compliments, came to blows and battered one another's faces. From time to time this even developed into mass battles between the high-school boys and the Cadets with hundreds taking part and scores of casualties. All these fights invariably took place on the ruins of the old fort. The result of the battle was usually decided by the so-called 'District boys', i.e. the pupils of the District School in the town, which had four forms. They played the part of a kind of 'neutral power', which both sides began to court long before the battle. The 'District boys', however, always kept one guessing as to their attitude. They tried to 'milk' both the high-school boys and the Cadets, leaving both sides in ignorance of their real intentions, and then, at the very last moment, when the battle was at its height, they unexpectedly turned up in a body at the fort and by their intervention immediately swayed the balance in favour of one side or the other. Many years later, while working in the sphere of foreign policy, I have often remembered with a smile the 'District boys' of Omsk: they taught me my first lesson in diplomacy. The big fights between the Cadets and the high-school boys were the greatest sensation in the life of Omsk, and the whole town talked about them for weeks on end. In honour of these battles the local poets composed rapturous odes, in which the word *dubasil* ('bashed') rhymed with *raskvasil* ('squashed'), and *bil po mordam* ('punched their jaws') with *likhim chortom* ('dare-devil'). The odes were copied out and passed

from hand to hand and their literary aspects were even discussed in the teachers' common room.

The town itself, whose population at this time was only about 30,000 to 35,000, had a miserable, depressing appearance. The houses were built of wood and had only one storey with gloomy little windows and roofs of deal boards or thatch. The streets were dusty, unpaved and covered with impassable mud in the spring and autumn. In the market place the mud was so deep that horses sank into it right up to their bellies, and little boys paddled about on it in troughs. There were no street lamps, and at night pitch darkness reigned in the town. Neither was there any drainage system or water supply. The refuse was carted away at night by garbage men who were nicknamed *zolotari* ('gold-diggers'), and water was brought round in the morning by water-carriers. There was only oil lighting, and a lamp known as 'The Lightning' was very popular. It cost three roubles, and for this reason the possession of a 'Lightning' lamp was regarded as the hall-mark of prosperity. Two miserable wooden bridges across the Om joined the parts of the town on either bank of the river. Above this scene of grey, flat, blackened wooden buildings there towered, looking somehow strange and out of place, about a dozen red and white stone buildings—the Governor-General's House, the Cadet School, the barracks, the boys' and girls' high-schools, the police-station, two fire-brigade watch-towers, the cathedral, and of course, on the road leading out of the town, the prison. These were the symbols of authority. But they were out of keeping with their surroundings and their solidity dominated the little wooden houses. All this was symbolic. Just outside the town were the painted wooden huts of the army camp, to which the troops moved out from the barracks for the summer, and farther on, in a little wood, was the army 'sanatorium', where from May onwards the patients of the military hospital, at which my father worked, were brought for convalescence. Here the convalescents lived in tents and drank *koumiss*, obtained from the Kazakh nomads roaming in the neighbourhood of Omsk. Later, in the second half of the '90's, a railway station was built in this district, and a fine six-span railway bridge was thrown across the River Irtysh. For some reason the engineers found it necessary to run the railway line not through Omsk itself but four miles away from it. Malicious gossip said this was due to the stinginess of our 'City Fathers', who grudged a few thousand roubles with which to grease the palms of the railway constructors. Whether this was so or not, I do not know, but it is very probable.

The population of Omsk was divided into three main groups—the military, the merchants, and the lower middle classes. The military were, so to speak, the 'first estate' who held the power in their hands. The Governor-General, who was also the Commander of the West-Siberian Military District, was 'God and Tsar' here. The officers and Army officials constituted 'Society', which created the 'public opinion' of the town. All these people lived 'from the 20th to the 20th' (in Tsarist Russia officials were paid on the 20th of each month), strutted about, wrote official minutes, got drunk, went on the spree, gossiped, gambled, beat the soldiers and composed absurd songs for the 'Christ-

loving soldiery'. I remember how at one time columns of soldiers marched briskly through the streets of the town, roaring at the top of their voices:

*Orbeliyani's a General,
And Svinin is likewise,
But Baryatinski has found
That they are alike.*

This profound composition on the part of a local second-captain roused Omsk military circles for a long time. Later, when I was grown up, I discovered that the soldiers' songs of other European countries were no less profound than the inspired composition of the modest Siberian officer.¹

The merchants, that is to say, the shop-keepers of all kinds, big, middling and small, composed, if one may use the expression, the 'second estate' of our town. They cringed to the military, but brutally exploited the poor of the town and the Kazakhs in the neighbourhood. The Omsk *bourgeoisie* of those days presented a dreadful spectacle. It was still the *bourgeoisie* of the period of the primitive accumulation of wealth—rough, uncouth, illiterate, with coarse manners and savage pleasures. Tipsy young merchants smashed the mirrors in the restaurants, jumped into baths of champagne with their boots on, rushed furiously through the streets in their troikas, whooping and shouting and running over people, at night they drove out to the neighbouring villages of Zakhlamino and Chereomishkino, where they indulged in orgies and beat the local peasants unmercifully.

Finally, the lower middle classes represented a sort of 'third estate'. They were mostly home craftsmen, artisans, shop assistants, gardeners, *izvozchiks* (cabmen), water-carters, sewage disposal men, etc.—all the small folk, who in one way or another served the needs of the first two 'estates'. The lower middle classes lived on the outskirts of the town, mostly in a suburb which bore the picturesque name of Mokroye ('Wet'), worked from dawn to sunset, were paid a few paltry copecks, got blind drunk and at holiday times amused themselves with fights, which took place on the ice of the river Om.

The local population had no serious interests, high aspirations or demands. The belly was the centre of everything. They did not eat, they gorged. They did not drink, they got drunk. The whole atmosphere of the town was permeated with the smell of baking and cooking. At Shrove-tide they made hills of ice which they decorated with lanterns, rode in big sledges with coloured carpets and gorged themselves sick. At Easter they gave such hearty Easter kisses that their lips swelled up.

¹ In Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany, for instance, I heard the following soldiers' song:

*Reserve hat Ruhe,
Reserve hat Ruh,
Und wenn Reserve Ruhe hat,
Dann hat Reserve Ruh.*

Translated, this means: "The reserve has leave, the reserve has leave. And if the reserve has leave, then the reserve has leave."

There was no theatre in the town, and it was only in Easter Week that there appeared, in the market square, a few show-booths with actors who were perpetually drunk and whose voices were husky with colds. There was also an amateur dramatic circle, in which the moving spirits were mostly the local 'lionesses' from among the officers' wives. This circle occasionally gave performances of modern plays in the Omsk 'Social Assembly Rooms'. However, these occasions were not very frequent: the circle spent most of its time in internal squabbles and intrigues.

Against the background of this 'kingdom of darkness', this sleepy, slimy, provincial swamp, there stood out like a homeless orphan, a tiny group of local 'intelligentsia'. A few lawyers and private doctors, two or three teachers, two or three journalists, a chemist, a photographer and some half-dozen officials of the Department of Emigration—these were approximately all who made up this social category which was so different from the prevailing *milieu*. There were also two or three casual personages of no settled occupation and with no definite sources of income. One of them I remember very well. He was a certain Simonov, a middle-aged man with spectacles who had his hair close cropped and wore high boots and a loose grey tunic-shirt outside his trousers with a leather belt. He was a student who had not finished his education, having been expelled from the university in connection with some disturbance or other. He kept a small stationery shop in Tomskaya Street, and he did not so much sell exercise-books and ink as engage his customers in discussions on social and educational subjects. The shop brought him nothing but losses, but he somehow managed to keep going and did not shut up shop 'for exclusively idealistic reasons', as he expressed it. The Omsk 'intelligentsia' was grouped round the local geographical society, at which the army topographers read reports on their travels in Siberia, and also round the local newspaper, *Stepnoi Krai*, which came out twice a week and sternly demanded of the 'City Fathers' the construction of pavements and measures to deal with stray dogs.

It cannot be said that the intellectual life of the Omsk intelligentsia was a gushing fountain. Nevertheless they tried in their own small way to keep up to date. They subscribed to the *Birzhevka*,¹ from which they took their bearings on political and international questions. They held collective readings of the fashionable works of fashionable authors. I remember at our house they read and discussed Leo Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*, which had just been published. The discussions were very heated, but in the end they all came to the conclusion that Tolstoy was an aristocrat and 'crazy'. I also remember that at the time of the Dreyfus affair (1897) the entire Omsk intellectual circle was greatly excited and warmly sympathized with Emile Zola and Labory, and that during the Boer War (1899–1902) they sang the Boer anthem and loudly abused 'perfidious Britannia'. In winter the intelligentsia went skating on a rink constructed near the bridge on the ice over the river

¹ This was the popular name for the St. Petersburg newspaper, the *Birzhevye Viedomosti*, a Liberal gutter-press organ, which was popular among the provincial intelligentsia in those days.

Om. In summer they used to migrate outside the town, hiring tents from the Kazakh nomads in the neighbourhood and putting them up in groups in the so-called 'Zagorodnaya Roshtcha'—a wood near the town—or near the military sanatorium. Here they all rested, that is to say, they slept sixteen hours a day, got up picnics combined with drinking bouts, and fished in the river Irtysh.

Although my father had every right to be a member of the 'first estate' on account of his service position, his disposition and sympathies inclined him in another direction altogether. From the first days of his life in Omsk, he, and especially my mother, joined the group of local 'intelligentsia'.

Such was Omsk in the days of my childhood.

CHAPTER FIVE

Early Years

WHEN I RECALL the early years of my childhood, I mostly see myself in my room at home making toy ships. I do not know where I got this craze from. By my origins and conditions of life I always was and have remained till now a complete 'land-lubber'. But in those days I was literally mad about the sea and everything connected with it. I loved pictures of the sea and of ships gliding with swelling sails over the ocean waves. I loved story books about distant voyages and soul-stirring adventures at sea. I wanted to become a sailor myself, and more than once I dreamed I was the captain of some amazing ship in which I did heroic deeds and discovered new countries.

All this passionate enthusiasm for the sea found its concrete expression in making toy ships. I was always dabbling with files, hammers, chisels, bits of wood, tin, wires, screws and other elements of juvenile shipbuilding. The floor of my room was always littered with shavings, filings, iron cuttings, lumps of glue and all kinds of other rubbish, which often drove my mother to despair. I made a good many ships of all kinds—large and small, warships and merchantmen, steamers and sailing vessels. I carefully studied the pictures of ships in my books and tried to copy them in my constructions. Some were successful and others were not. However, the failures never upset me, and after them I redoubled my efforts. But I proudly related all my achievements to my cousin Birdie—the same one with whom I sat in the children's bath in Moscow and who, in the capacity of best friend, was a constant solace throughout my childhood and early youth.¹ I still have two letters of mine to Birdie, written in a child's sprawling hand-

¹ My cousin, whose real name was Elizaveta, was so tiny as a child that my father called her "Birdie". This nickname stuck to her in our family circle.

writing without punctuation, and as it happens on the subject of ship-building. In one letter relating to the beginning of 1892, when I had just turned eight, I wrote: "I have already made a little ship, in which Yulenka's dolls can go for a sail." A few months later I again wrote to Birdie: "I am now building a warship, an armour-plated frigate called *Hero*. She has 20 cannon and 25 guns. She has 2 sheet anchors and 5 spare anchors." Lower down, at the end of the letter, there is a drawing in coloured pencil of this 'armour-plated frigate', which for some reason had to have '25 guns'.

Another outward manifestation of my enthusiasm for the sea was the passionate interest which I took at that time in navigation on the rivers Irtysh and Om. The Irtysh at Omsk is a big river, a quarter of a mile wide, with a rapid current and turgid, yellowish-grey water. Even in those distant days there was considerable navigation on the Irtysh, and you could go by water from Omsk to Semipalatinsk, Tobolsk, Tiumen, Tomsk and the mouth of the Ob. A comparatively large number of small single-deck steamers, partly of the tug type and partly cargo-passenger boats, plied along the Irtysh. The steam-tugs did not take passengers as a rule. They towed two or three enormous, heavily-laden barges and their speed was not more than three or four miles an hour. The cargo-passenger boats had cabins for the passengers, usually towed a single barge of a less unwieldy type, and had a speed of seven to eight miles an hour. At Omsk all the steamers stopped at the mouth of the Om, where the wharves and warehouses were concentrated. Here there was a constant coming and going of people, and I grew passionately fond of visiting this 'port' of Omsk. I used to spend all my free time there, strolling about the wharves and steamers, looking at everything, listening and nosing about, and making friends with boys as inquisitive as myself. I soon got to know all about the harbour life of our town. I knew, without any time-table, when this or that steamer was due to arrive and depart. I knew what the fare was from one point to another. I knew that the ships of the Kornilov company were blue and the ships of the Kurbatov company orange, and that the Kornilov ship *Dobrynya* was the most powerful, and the Kurbatov ship *Fortuna* the fastest steamer on the Irtysh. I knew when and where any ship was built, the horse-power and speed of its engine, who its captain was, whether he was cross-grained or good-natured, and whether he allowed boys to go on deck when the ship was berthed, or whether he chased them off by the scruff of the neck. I listened to the stories of the pilots and sailors about their work and adventures and about the distant towns and places they visited, the crystal green waters of the Tom, the shoals and sandbanks of the Tura, the broad reaches of the Lower Irtysh, the majestic might and immeasurable breadth of the Ob, and about the Arctic regions where for three months it is day and for three months it is night. And gradually I formed an idea of the boundless spaces of Siberia, its incomparably grandiose nature, its rivers flowing for thousands of miles, its vast forests stretching for hundreds of miles without a break, its cold tundras covering territories that surpass the area of large States. In some kind of elemental way I understood and sensed the vast scale of Siberia, in comparison

with which all the scales not only of Europe but even of the European part of Russia seem small, almost pocket editions. The stories about the river Ob made a particularly strong impression on my imagination. It appeared to me to be something boundless, mighty, wildly stern and beautiful, and I must admit that I was not disillusioned when some time later I actually found myself on the banks of this gigantic river. I became a real devotee and patriot of the Ob, and in my correspondence with Birdie I ardently proved that the Ob was what a river should be and that the Volga in comparison was 'not worth an eggshell'.

The hours I spent in the 'port' of Omsk had an additional significance for me, as they awakened in me a longing for travel and the love of geography, which I have retained all my life. These sentiments were further nourished and stimulated by reading. My father took out a subscription for me to a well-known children's newspaper of those days called *Nature and People*, which I devoured from cover to cover. My mother often read out to us extracts from Brehm's famous book *The Life of Animals*. I also remember I had a beautifully bound thick book called *The Life of the Sea*, in which I would study for hours the beautifully executed illustrations of marine fish, plants and animals.

Games, of course, were not forgotten. At one time I was very fond of playing at knuckle-bones. I made my own 'casts'¹ and 'played the gypsy' outrageously, bartering knuckle-bones and 'casts' with the boys of our street. Later on I grew tired of knuckle-bones; but on the other hand I became very fond of playing 'thieves and robbers'. Together with a few other scapegraces like myself, I raided the neighbouring melon-plots and kitchen-gardens, trying to outdo the rest of the boys in boldness, daring and brazen impudence. At home I had any amount of vegetables, musk melons and water melons, but they had no attraction for me at all. It was quite another matter to steal furtively into a kitchen-garden, cunningly trick the owner and defy the law by pulling up a carrot, picking a gherkin or nipping off a pod of sweet-tasting green peas. To us boys this 'stolen' fruit tasted ten times sweeter than the 'lawful' fruit which was to be had at table in our homes. Once I nearly paid for this amusing game with my life. One day in the late autumn when the early frosts were beginning, our 'gang' raided a melon-plot and ate some bitter, frozen water-melons. That night I had severe stomach trouble: my temperature rose to 104, and I almost fainted from the terrible pains in my belly. My terrified mother did not know what to do. My father—as though on purpose—was away on some mission. Mother summoned a doctor she knew from his bed and together they somehow pulled me through by the morning.

After this incident I lost all interest in the game of 'thieves', and our gang took up the game of 'robbers'. Our favourite spot for this game was a broad, hilly meadow with hollows and small clumps of trees, adjoining the outskirts of the town where my family was living at that time. This meadow was intersected by a main thoroughfare—an ordinary Siberian road, dusty in summer, muddy in autumn and spring,

¹ In order to give more hitting power to the knuckle-bone with which the "jack" is smashed, I filled it with molten lead.

and covered with snow in winter; but for us boys it was an object of special attention and some sort of peculiar, half-conscious respect. It all came from the fact that this road, near which we played, was part of the seemingly endless Moscow highway, that ran from Moscow to Vladivostok, traversing the whole of European Russia and Siberia. Files of transports with merchandise passed along the Moscow highway, columns of soldiers marched, troikas flew along with important officials and officers, and gangs of convicts under escort tramped with clanking fetters. In our children's consciousness the very name of Moscow highway evoked the idea of something important and mysterious, enormous and mighty, unintelligibly beautiful, something that would make your cap drop off your head if you looked at it. Of course, we did not then understand the meaning of the word 'State', but by some obscure instinct, some subconscious flair, we came near to a vague perception of that complex concept, and, in some peculiar way, the Moscow highway became in our eyes its symbol and personification. Years later I was to learn that when ancient Rome conquered any country or province, the first thing she always did was to build a good road—the famous 'Roman road' which permanently connected the new possession with the capital of the State. Such a road served two purposes: it made it possible for Rome, in the event of necessity, to transfer her legions swiftly along it; and for the subjugated peoples it became the incarnation of the unity of the Empire to which they now belonged. We boys knew nothing about Roman history, but in the feelings which the Moscow highway awakened in us there was something akin to these echoes of antiquity. It was not without reason that you might often hear from the lips of even the most desperate ruffians of our street. "The Moscow highway . . . there's something for you now. . . ."

And again, almost unconsciously, we little creatures became aware of the vast Siberian scale of distance. Indeed, how could we do otherwise when every day we heard from passers by and travellers that it took ten days to go from Omsk to Tomsk, three weeks from Omsk to Irkutsk and something like two months from Omsk to Vladivostok. . . .

On 1st August, 1892, I entered the preparatory class of the Omsk High School for boys. I well remember that significant day in my life. All the day before I was in a state of excitement. I couldn't settle down to anything. Nervously I checked up on the text-books and exercise-books I was to take into class with me next day, and several times put on and took off my nice new high-school uniform. I slept badly during the night and was up again before dawn. For the first time Mother herself took me to the school—a dreary, yellowish, two-storeyed stone building with a covered wooden porch—and handed me over to the stout, grey-haired, liveried porter. After giving me a glance, the porter made a strange noise like a quack and remarked rather contemptuously. "The little gentleman's rather small, rather small. . . . He hasn't grown up."

I was then only eight-and-a-half years old, and in my grey high-

school uniform with an enormous satchel on my back I really did look like a tadpole. Noticing, however, that my mother had flared up, and evidently fearing a reprimand, the porter hastily added in a conciliating tone: "Never mind. . . . He'll grow up. . . . They all do."

A few moments later I was in the midst of a many-headed, noisy, bawling crowd of schoolboys running this way and that.

I returned home on foot, at first with a group of class-mates and then alone, and when I ran into my room with a purposely jaunty air and flung my satchel into the corner with a sweeping gesture, my mother exclaimed as though in horror: "Vanichka! What's the matter with you?"

She pointed to a big bruise adorning my right cheek, under the eye. Assuming a look of unconcern as though nothing particular had happened, I said hurriedly: "Oh, it's nothing! We jostled one another a bit during the interval."

"Fine jostling!" Mother exclaimed with feeling, and set about bathing the bruise with lotion.

In reality it had been a much more serious affair. During the long interval a fight had broken out between two groups of boys in the school yard. I was drawn into the fight against my will, and a third-form boy who was noted for his strength gave me a smashing blow in the face with his fist. I even saw stars, but I managed to keep myself from crying. This was my initiation as a high-school boy. But I considered it beneath my dignity to tell my mother all the details.

The first year of my studies at the high school have left hardly any recollections in my memory. Apparently nothing remarkable occurred. I sat at a desk in the front row, learnt my lessons well—I was the third or fourth pupil in a group of thirty—and got five marks for behaviour and four each for diligence and attention. However, I was not greatly interested in the work. Apparently this was due to the fact that I had been better prepared at home than was necessary for the preparatory class, and for the time being the high school was unable to teach me anything new.

It was during this period that I made my first acquaintance with 'scientific research'. As I have already mentioned, my father was engaged on various experiments and investigations. At the Omsk military hospital there was a musty little laboratory which consisted of two small rooms, poorly equipped and lacking even the most essential instruments and apparatus. Usually the laboratory was empty as none of the hospital doctors took any interest in scientific research. An old watchman named Potapich lived at the laboratory. He was an ex-soldier who regarded his job as a sort of sinecure. He would disappear for whole days into the market, which was close to the hospital, and do a little petty trading there on his own account. His attitude towards the laboratory was one of contempt. "What the deuce is the good of it!" he was fond of arguing. "If you're a proper doctor you don't need a laboratory. You know everything without that. And, if you're a bad doctor, a laboratory won't help you anyway."

In these circumstances it was not surprising that thermostats, retorts, and test-tubes on the tables, and the rest of the laboratory utensils

were invariably covered with a thick layer of dust which was never wiped off.

When my father began to work systematically in the laboratory, Potapich was indignant and made no secret of the fact that this was not at all to his liking. Soon he began to adopt tactics of secret sabotage. After struggling with Potapich for a while and getting no results, my father gave him up and allowed him to spend his time at the market. In place of Potapich, Father decided to get me to help him. In the early evening he would take me with him to the laboratory and I would wipe the dust off the instruments, keep an eye on the temperature of the thermostats, wash the retorts and flasks, and take down the figures of the weighings as Father made them. Little by little I got used to my duties and even began to understand something of my father's experiments. I also looked after the guinea-pigs, which Father used for his experiments and which lived in a big wooden cage that stood in our kitchen at home. I gave them their food and water, kept an eye on the state of their health, cleaned out the cage and changed the straw. I particularly wanted to learn how to weigh on the chemically precise scales. This was the goal of my aspirations, my ideal. And when at last, after a long probation, my father allowed me to touch the sacred scales and I was able to make my first weighing, which turned out to be correct, I felt just as Mendeleev must have felt when he composed his periodic table of the elements.

Gradually the laboratory eclipsed everything else—high school, knuckle-bones, robbers, and even ships. The laboratory became the pivot of my life. I loved being there. I loved its walls, its tables, its apparatus and instruments, its very air, but most of all the deep, thoughtful quiet with which it was filled. I could sit there for hours and never get bored. Whenever I crossed its threshold I always experienced a peculiarly festive feeling, a special uplifting of the mind, a sort of inner solemnity like that of a believer passing through the gates of a temple. Nor does it seem to me to have been something casual. Looking back now after half a century, I feel and realize that it was precisely in those early years when I washed the retorts and test-tubes in that miserable Omsk laboratory, that the belief in reason, science, knowledge, and the right of man to be master of life on earth was born and began to develop in my consciousness, a belief which ran like a beautiful thread through all my subsequent life, and which ultimately led me into the camp of Marxism-Leninism.

CHAPTER SIX

Travelling to Verny

IN THE SPRING OF 1893 my father was commissioned to accompany a batch of recruits from Omsk to Verny (now Alma-Ata). Batches like

these were sent every year. Recruits from the Akmolinsk region, and the Tobolsk and Tomsk provinces, which formed part of the Western-Siberian Governor-Generalship, were called up in the autumn and underwent their initial training in the barracks at Omsk during the winter. In the spring of the following year a part of them were sent to complete the term of their service, which in those days amounted to four years, at Verny, Przhevalsk, Zaisan, and other places in the Semirechensk region adjoining the Chinese frontier. Being 'unattached medical officer under the Omsk Army-Medical Department', my father was sent to accompany one of these batches of young soldiers. He took me with him, and the journey, which, with all its complications, lasted more than two months, has always remained in my memory as one of the brightest events of my childhood.

The distance from Omsk to Verny is 2,000 versts. The route was long and complicated and went by way of rivers, mountains, and deserts, in various climates and amid a variety of flora and fauna. But this made it all the more interesting for a nine-year-old traveller who was eager for sights.

All our party of 300 recruits embarked on the river steamers. The officer in charge of the party, and Father as the accompanying doctor, took up their quarters on board the Kurbatov steamer *Fortuna*, which, as the fastest vessel on the Irtysh, had already long excited my imagination. The recruits under the command of the sergeant-major and a few N.C.O.s who acted as 'bear-leaders', took their places on a big barge, which was towed by the *Fortuna*. There was hardly room for all of them, and they were packed close together. Some of the recruits slept on deck; but Stepanich, the sergeant-major, a stout, red-haired, pock-marked man of forty, was quite unperturbed about that. Nervously twirling his neatly-pointed moustache, he bounced about like a ball from one end of the barge to the other, giving orders, shouting, pushing, swearing obscenely, and shaking his huge red fist that looked as though it were made of iron.

"Hurry up, filly!" he shouted in a terrible voice. "Hurry up! It's a close fit, but it won't hurt. On the bench or under the bench, all the places are paid for by the Government. Get along there! Else . . ."

Whereupon Stepanich eloquently swung his fist through the air. It made an impression.

Then for four days and nights the *Fortuna* moved slowly upstream along the Irtysh. The river got narrower and narrower and the current ever faster. The population along the banks constantly changed in character: there were fewer and fewer Russians and more and more Kazakhs. On the fifth day, having travelled about 800 versts by water, we arrived at last at Semipalatinsk—a small, dusty, provincial town, which had already something of an Oriental character. Here our party disembarked and crossed over to the opposite bank of the Irtysh, where they camped before going on farther.

I distinctly remember the peculiar method of crossing the river. At this point it was 700 feet wide and the current was extremely rapid. The haulers towed the ferry-boat five or six versts upstream, beyond the place on the opposite bank to which it was to cross. Then the men and

baggage were taken on board the ferry-boat, which pushed off from the bank and floated downstream with the current. Skilfully manoeuvring an oar, the helmsman steered the ferry-boat so that the current drove it across to the opposite bank at the required spot. This operation was not always successful and the ferry-boat was sometimes carried beyond the mooring-place. Then a terrible shout arose from the ferry-boat and the shore. People ran about, excited and waving their hands, but the current held sway and the ferry-boat reached the bank somewhere a mile or two lower down, where it was difficult to disembark. On the return journey the haulers again towed the ferry-boat along the opposite bank five or six miles upstream and then let it go downstream with the current. This method of crossing, which was traditional almost from the days of Genghis Khan, of course required a good deal of time. But nobody begrimed time in those days. It took us over two days before our party of 300 men and a dozen vehicles with horses at last found themselves on the left bank of the Irtysh opposite the town.

The party was to cover the 1,200 versts from Semipalatinsk to Verny in marching order, i.e. on foot. There was transport for the officer, the doctor, the field hospital, and the field kitchen, but the recruits had to march the whole way. Their average daily march was twenty to twenty-five versts. Every third day was a day of rest. Usually they rose at dawn, had breakfast, and then marched for five or six hours as far as the next halting-place, making a few brief halts for rest on the way. On arrival at the halting-place they pitched their tents, cooked dinner, busied themselves with various routine matters and went to bed with the birds after posting sentries on guard for the night. On rest days they washed, cleaned themselves up, did their mending and tidying up, and in the evenings they danced merrily in a circle to the rowdy strains of the harmonica. When on the march they sang various soldiers' songs in chorus. I remember most of all one which began with the words:

*Black as a daw,
Sweet as a meadow,
What's this, Marusenka,
Dark-browed beauty,
Why aren't you sleeping at home?*

The strains of the song quivered in the air, filling the open space, trailing over the steppes and hills, and gradually died away in the distance.

The first part of the route traversed desert places from Semiplatinsk to Sergiopol. Then we went on to Kopal and from there to Verny. The farther south we travelled the more interesting, varied and rich became the country. We passed Lake Balkhash and crossed a number of wildly-foaming mountain rivers—the Aksa, Koksa, Karatal, and Almatinka—which raced ahead like wild horses. We went through wonderful mountain valleys, crossed high mountain ranges and descended to the course of the River Ili, which rises in Chinese territory. On the way we saw magnificent orchards, innumerable melon-plots with enormous water-melons, beautiful southern flowers and forests entwined with liana. But the sun! We poor northerners had never seen such a bright,

hot, triumphant sun. All this fired the imagination and filled the mind with thousands of questions and impressions.

Together with my father, I was of course fully entitled to ride in one of the vehicles the whole time. But I did not even think of availing myself of the privilege. It was out of the question! From the very first day of the march I had resolved to be a 'real soldier'. With Stepanich's permission I marched beside him at the head of the column of recruits. At first it was hard. Although I was a healthy boy, twenty to twenty-five versts a day proved to be beyond my strength. For this reason I marched half the way and sat in the carriage for the other half. However, I gradually began to get accustomed to it, and little by little I got into such form that by the end of the journey I was almost a match for any soldier. It was a good education, and it is probably the origin of my capacity and fondness for walking, which I have retained all my life. I learnt all the tricks of the recruits on the march, swaying like them, swinging my arms like them and even spitting out sideways through my teeth as Kartashev, the right file leader, was able to do. He was a lad from the Turinsk district and I got very friendly with him during the march. During the halts I also went among the soldiers and listened to their conversations, songs, and stories; and I preferred dinner from the soldiers' pot to the dinner which the army cook prepared specially for the commander of the party and my father.

It was a wonderful time and a great adventure for a boy of nine who was only just beginning to open his eyes on the world. I felt as though I was walking on air almost all the time. I was simply choking with the brightness and abundance of the impressions I received. But the world which appeared before my innocent child's eye was a world of various hues. There was plenty of light in it, but there were also shadows; and no small number of them either.

I remember how during the rest day at Kopal the local garrison decided to amuse our party with something out of the ordinary and staged in our honour a performance of *The Emperor Maximilian*, a play which was very popular in the army in those days. For two hours the 'military artistes' raved, stamped, and fought on the tiny stage in the stuffy barracks in a temperature of 112 degrees. All the parts were taken by men. The 'Emperor' and all his courtiers were dressed in absolutely fantastic uniforms, rattling and jingling at every movement. Soldier's boots smelling strongly of tar peeped out from beneath the blue dress of the "Empress Elvira." I cannot remember now what the play was about, but I know that even I, a boy of nine, was bewildered by its absurdity. In addition to this there was the performance. I shall never forget how in one of the scenes the appallingly ugly 'Emperor Maximilian', gripping his sabre, cried out in a menacing voice to his rival:

*Approach me not with brazen daring,
Or I will run you through with this my trusty sword!
Gazes at it in brackets!*

Actually the 'Emperor Maximilian's' exclamation ended at the second line, after which came the stage direction in brackets: 'Gazes

at it'. The soldier, however, made no distinction between the text and the stage direction, and with enviable conscientiousness spouted it all together.

"What a stupid play!" said my father, when we were returning from the performance to our tent.

The officer of the local garrison who was walking with us replied with a laugh of contempt: "Fools don't need anything better".

I was deeply pained. 'Fools!' I thought to myself, as I walked alongside the grown-ups. 'So he thinks all soldiers are fools? That's not true! My friend Kartashev is far from being a fool. He can tell stories and sing songs so well. And the other soldiers are no fools either. Why does he call all soldiers fools?'

At the time I was unable to find a satisfactory explanation of the officer's words, but I remembered them and it seemed to me that they hid some weighty secret, which was as yet unintelligible to me.

I recall another incident. On rest days Stepanich and the 'bear-leaders' usually gave talks to the recruits. These took the form of a kind of political catechism which the Tsarist Government tried to knock into the head of every soldier. Having gathered thirty to forty men around him in a meadow, Stepanich would begin to teach them this wisdom.

"What does the duty of a soldier consist in?" he shouted in a voice of thunder, gazing ferociously at his listeners.

He then gave the response himself: "The duty of a soldier consists in beating the external and internal enemy without sparing his own life."

All the recruits had to repeat the response in chorus and learn it off by heart.

Then came the question: "What is the flag?" This was followed by the reply: "The flag is a sacred banner."

Again they all had to repeat this definition after Stepanich and learn it off by heart.

I do not now remember the precise formulas of the Tsarist political catechism, but this was their actual sense. Among the questions of the soldier's catechism there was also the following. "What is your weapon?" To which Stepanich invariably replied: "A rifle of Berdan's chesten model number two".

Although I regularly attended the talks, I could never understand the meaning of this mystical formula. What did 'chesten' mean? What was 'Berdan'? Several times I tried to ask Stepanich about it, but he only frowned angrily and muttered:

"Chesten is chesten, and Berdan is Berdan—that's all there is to it. What is there you can't understand in that?"

One day during the class a little book fell out of Stepanich's pocket. I picked it up and began to glance through it. It turned out to be the very same soldier's catechism which the sergeant-major was drumming into the heads of the recruits with so much persistence. I quickly turned over the pages and came across the response about the rifle which had seemed so strange to me. In the original it ran: "A rifle of Berdan's system model number 2".

The explanation was quite simple. Delighted with my discovery and being as yet ill-versed in bureaucratic psychology, I joyfully exclaimed: "Stepanich! Stepanich! I've found it!" And poking my finger into the little book, I added: "You mustn't say 'a rifle of Berdan's chesten', but 'a rifle of Berdan's system' . . ."

I was unable to finish speaking. Stepanich suddenly went red as a lobster, snatched the book angrily out of my hands and roared savagely: "Eggs don't teach a hen! Here's another wanting to play the teacher!"

I was quite dumbfounded. As I went away from the catechism class, I tried in vain to find an answer to the question: why did Stepanich stuff the soldiers' heads with all kinds of nonsense?

After this clash my relations with Stepanich showed a marked deterioration. And not long afterwards another incident happened which caused us to fall out completely.

We were already only a few days' march from Verny. During a halt beside a mountain river, I was running about a field with a gauze net, chasing beautiful butterflies. All of a sudden I stopped as though glued to the spot. A few yards away from me, under a cluster of trees, was Stepanich, and what a sight he was! Bright crimson and mad with rage, he was punching my friend Kartashev in the face. His huge iron fists were moving methodically backwards and forwards, and Kartashev's head was bobbing from one side to the other as though helpless. A thin stream of blood flowed from Kartashev's lip. I was beside Stepanich in the twinkling of an eye, and wild with fury I shouted: "Stop! Stop! don't you dare! I'll tell Papa."

Dumbfounded with surprise, Stepanich stopped. Then, catching sight of me, he burst into a torrent of obscene abuse. However, his desire to go on with the punishment seemed to have left him, and with another round of abuse he turned sharply and went back to the camp. When he was already a good way off, I said to Kartashev, who was wiping away the blood: "What was he hitting you like that for?"

Kartashev looked embarrassed and began to fumble nervously with his tunic. However, I insisted. At last, Kartashev, looking askance, began to speak in a low voice:

"When I was called up in the autumn," he said, "my mother gave me three roubles as a parting gift. 'Take care of it,' she said. 'You'll need it for a rainy day.' But that devil, Stepanich, got to know about it. - He started pestering me. 'Give me the three roubles,' he said. He has been pestering me almost all the way from Semipalatinsk. I tried to shake him off. I told him I wanted the money for myself. To-day he caught me and he kept going on and going on. 'We'll be in Verny in three days' time,' he says. 'You, you swine'll have to stay there and I'll go back to Omsk. Give me the money,' he says. 'Give me the money at once, this instant. If you don't give it to me, you'll remember me for a hell of a long time!' Then he began to punch me in the face like hell . . ."

At supper that evening I related the whole story with indignation to my father and the commander of the party who was sitting with us. My father nodded his head significantly, but the officer—a service man

who thought only of his career—snapped crossly “Young man, you’d better not meddle with things that don’t concern you”.

I felt hurt and took myself off to bed without saying good night to the officer. However, as it turned out later on, in spite of his smack at me, the officer had a talk about the matter with Stepanich. It was not altogether a pleasant talk. The next day Stepanich looked at me like a snarling wolf. He neither greeted me nor spoke to me. At Verny we parted as enemies. Father’s relations with the commander of the party were also upset. Many years later Father told me that after I had gone off to the tent that evening, the officer began to condemn not only my conduct but also the education which led to actions of that sort. Father got angry and declared with icy disapproval: “It’s not the right thing to beat the soldiers.”

The officer tried to object, but my father stuck to his point. As a result the diplomatic relations between the commander of the party and the doctor were ruined.

Yes, shadows were looming across the bright sky of my impressions of life, and causing me to think.

But at the same time how many bright, shining, deep, unforgettable experiences engraved themselves upon my memory and have remained there ever since!

Here is one of them.

Our party pitched its camp in a green hollow between the mountains. The local inhabitants gathered together and came up to the camp. An exchange of news, opinions, and produce began. The headman of the nearest hamlet introduced himself in a military fashion to the commander of the party and my father. He was a man of past fifty, still strong and vigorous, with a bronze-coloured face, bushy eyebrows, and a beard turning grey. Pulling off his tall sheepskin cap, which the men in these parts wear even in the hottest weather, he told us, among other things, that a couple of versts from the camp there was a ‘wonderful well’ which had no bottom.

“No bottom?” my father asked in amazement.

The headman respectfully bowed his head and, as though apologizing for the well’s bad behaviour, repeated that the well really had no bottom. Perceiving our incredulity, he suggested we should go and see for ourselves. A small group of us, five in number, went off to the well. In a little sandy square stood a small wooden booth, black with age. We went inside. Before us was a small, round cistern eight or nine feet in diameter. The water was clear as crystal and seemed, at first sight, to be no more than four or five feet deep. The bottom was covered with fine yellow sand. It looked firm and one felt inclined to jump into the water and feel the bottom with one’s foot. I looked at it keenly and suspiciously—the sand was like any other sand. There was nothing out of the ordinary. Only if you looked very closely, it seemed as though faint, hardly perceptible sandy waves were rippling one after the other from the sandy bottom to the periphery. Or did it only seem so, perhaps?

“This is the ‘wonderful well’,” said the headman “Try to throw a stone into it.”

I hastily picked up a small pebble from the ground and threw it

into the well. It sank to the bottom and immediately disappeared somewhere in the depths under the sand. My father and the commander of the party followed my example—the result was the same.

"Fetch some ropes from the camp," ordered the officer.

The ropes were brought, and the officer set about measuring the depth. The ropes were tied together and a heavy stone was fixed to one end as a plummet. The rope was brandished and thrown in. Three hundred and fifty feet long, it disappeared into the sand of the well and did not reach the bottom. The headman looked with satisfaction at the well, which had not let him down, and added with conviction: "The man has yet to be born to reach the bottom! Lots of people have come here and tried just as you did, but it was no good".

The old man locked up the little booth, and we returned to the camp, carrying on a lively discussion about the riddle of Nature we had just seen.

Here is another incident. We were spending the night right on the shore of Lake Balkhash. It is an enormous lake—two hundred and sixty-five miles long and from thirteen to thirty-two miles wide, like a huge caterpillar stretching from west to east. To-day the Lake Balkhash area is a big industrial centre which has arisen under the magic wand of Stalin's Five-Year Plans. Half a century ago the place was a wilderness and the low shores of the lake were covered with thick growths of giant reeds inhabited by boars and tigers.

It was in the middle of the night. The camp was sound asleep. The sentries were hard put to it to overcome their drowsiness. Suddenly the darkness was rent by a terrible, inhuman roar. It came again and again, nearer and nearer. It grew louder and louder, and more and more terrible. It was a tiger.

The camp sprang to life in a moment. The frightened recruits jumped out of their beds and began rushing about among the tents. These lads of Omsk, Tobolsk, and Tiumen had never met with tigers before. Wolves, bears, wolverines were another matter. But a tiger! Most of them had never even heard of such an animal.

I woke up, too, and ran out of the tent in my shirt. A tiger! Where's the tiger? It was terrifying but also very exciting. And meanwhile the tiger was roaming about out there in the night somewhere quite near. His terrible roar, that made you hold your breath, could be heard first here, then there. One of the soldiers even said he had seen him with his own eyes, only just now, "here in this very spot".

"Light the camp fires!" ordered the commander of the party.

A minute later fires began to glow in various parts of the camp. Another moment and long tongues of flame were leaping up into the sky and lighting up the surroundings with a red glare. The tiger's roar rent the air again, but now it was weaker than before. Again and again it came, but the sound was getting farther off. The tiger had seen the fires and retreated into the reeds. The agitated camp gradually quietened down and all was calm again . . .

Yet another incident. We had halted at Sergiopol for a day's rest. The chief of the local garrison, Second-Captain Krutikov, welcomed our party. He was a tall man with fair hair and blue eyes, and looked about

forty. He had an upright, military bearing, and his gestures were precise and energetic. But his thoughtful, contemplative expression seemed out of harmony with his external appearance and bearing. We learnt from the people around him that he had the reputation of being a good officer, but he was by no means an ordinary one.

In the evening Krutikov invited the commander of the party and my father to supper. Of course, I went with my father too. Krutikov lived in the outskirts of the little town in a small wooden house surrounded on all sides with a fine garden abounding in semi-tropical vegetation. The house was clean, well built, and comfortable, but its whole appearance and atmosphere had something strangely intellectual that seemed incomprehensible in such wild parts. The commander of our party left immediately after supper on the pretext of having to attend to urgent business, but my father and I stayed on. Being slightly drunk, Krutikov became more candid and talkative. He invited us from the dining-room into his study. I well remember my father, on going into the study, suddenly stopped and looked round the room in amazement. Indeed, the picture it presented was most unusual for the apartment of a humble second-captain of those days, especially in the remote depths of the Siberian country. All the walls of the study were closely lined with books—large and small, thick and thin, in beautiful bindings and in simple paper covers.

"What a big library you've got!" my father exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes, I've got a few books," Krutikov said modestly. Then he added, as though apologizing. "It's a passion with me, you know. Books. . . . Condensed human thought. . . . What can be more beautiful and instructive than that?"

The library immediately prejudiced my father in favour of Krutikov, as he, too, was fond of books and was also interested in the work of the human mind. The conversation soon took on a more intimate and friendly tone. It appeared that Krutikov was a military historian, an amateur, no doubt, but a well-read man who knew his subject and had firm views and explicit judgments. That evening he talked a lot about Russia's past, her age-long struggle for existence, her all-enduring people and her great military leaders. In particular he very often mentioned Suvorov—a name I had not heard till then. Krutikov spoke of Suvorov with the greatest respect, enthusiasm, even ecstasy. My father agreed with him in many things, but towards the end he remarked with a sigh: "Yes, Suvorov was no doubt a great man and a great patriot. But where are the Suvorovs to-day? There don't seem to be any."

Krutikov also sighed, but afterwards he proudly lifted up his head and exclaimed in a tone of profound conviction: "No matter if there are no Suvorovs at present. They will be! They've got to be! A people who produced Suvorov a hundred years ago can't fail to produce them."

A moment later he added in altogether a different voice that seemed somehow wilted: "If you only knew, doctor, how sick I feel sometimes when I look around me! When I look at my colleagues, our methods, all our existing army system . . . I feel it's not the right way. They're not going about it the right way to produce Suvorovs. But what can

I do to help? Me, a paltry second-captain, commander of the garrison in Sergiopol?"

Many years later, remembering that meeting with Krutikov, I couldn't help being struck by the way in which that humble army officer, marooned in an out-of-the-way corner of the world far from life and culture, realized so prophetically the inevitability of the tragedy which was to be enacted twenty years later on the fields of Manchuria.

And here is a final incident. We were already at Verny. The party of recruits had been handed over to the local command, and Father had become a free man. He had nothing further to worry about. Verny is an amazingly beautiful place. It lies at the very foot of the high Alexandrovsk range which is covered with perpetual snow. Its little white houses nestle among the rich foliage of the south. The whole little town is like a large flowering garden watered by noisy, merry mountain streams.

My father made the acquaintance of the doctors and officers of the local garrison. A small party of mountaineers invited him to take part in an expedition to the highest point of the Alexandrovsk range. It was an attractive proposition, but what was he to do with me? They were going to climb to a height of 16,000 feet! My father hesitated and at first decided to leave me out. I was full of despair and annoyance. I put up a furious resistance, swearing in God's name that I was as good as any of the grown-ups and that nobody would hear a word of complaint from me on the way. In the end my father softened and to my great delight decided to take me with him.

And so we set out. Heavily laden with all kinds of mountaineering equipment of local manufacture, we slowly climbed on horse-back up the steep slopes of the range. There was mortal danger at every step: narrow paths, bottomless chasms, perpendicular crags, giant trees of enormous girth entwined with tropical lianas. The lower slopes of the range were covered with a thick belt of virgin forest teeming with wild animals and venomous snakes. From time to time the air resounded with strange, ominous cries, and a suspicious rustling came from behind the impenetrable network of twining plants. Now and again our little cavalcade was obliged to halt, while the guides set about cutting a path through the thicket of shrubs and lianas with their axes. Throwing back your head, you gazed up at the trees, whose tops stretched high up into the sky. They were so high, and their trunks so mighty, that it was impossible to cut them down either with saws or with axes. They could only be blasted. This indeed was the practice of the local inhabitants, who used to hurl chunks of the blasted trees from one rock to another until, battered and broken, they rolled down by the force of their own weight to the villages at the foot of the mountains.

At last we got through the forest and came out on to some alpine meadows with beautiful flowers of many colours. We put up the tents and made our arrangements for the night. Then we brewed tea over a camp fire, roasted some mutton and went to sleep for a few hours till daybreak. At dawn we set out again. But this time we made different arrangements. The horses were to remain here, at an altitude of 6,000 feet, and await our return. There was no path for them to go any higher.

We all loaded ourselves with rucksacks of local make, ropes, alpine stocks, picks, and all sorts of other mountaineering equipment. The most difficult part of the ascent was now before us. Hour after hour, under the leadership of two experienced guides, we slowly climbed higher and higher. Rocks, crevices, precipices. Precipices, crevices, rocks. Foaming mountain torrents rushed wildly by. The jaws of bottomless chasms yawned darkly. The wind howled, and the damp mists of the clouds went whirling past. With every step forward one found it harder to breathe and fatigue increased. But we went on and on, clinging to crags, hanging over the precipices and leaping across chasms. My father came up to me and asked rather slyly. "Well, aren't you sorry you came?"

I was dead tired. I wanted nothing more in the world than to drop down on the ground and not go on or move, but just lie still for hours on end. But I would have died rather than show it. So, shrugging my shoulders slightly, I said with feigned unconcern: "What nonsense! I'm feeling grand."

My father realized my condition and took me firmly by the arm. I made a pretence at shaking him off, but inwardly I was terribly relieved. It made it easier for me to go on, and I felt my fatigue less.

We spent the second night in a deep crevice in the rock, out of the wind, and at the beginning of the glacier line. It was much less comfortable than the day before. We slept side by side in one small tent. We ate cold meat and drank cold, brown tea. We rose before dawn and having roped ourselves together we entered the ice-field. We advanced cautiously for a long time, now descending into crevasses, now scrambling up the ribs of the rocks. The snow that had frozen during the night crunched pleasantly under our feet. The breath came in steam from our nostrils. It was slippery underfoot and very frightening, but at the same time I felt gay and high-spirited. The dawn was reflected with magical iridescence on the snowy heights. The mountain peaks flamed with bright red fire, and lilac shadows filled the hollows and chasms. Higher and higher we mounted, nearer and nearer we came to our goal. And now at last we were at the summit.

What a majestic, what an amazing scene!

Before us to the north stretched the endless expanse of the wide, variegated valley, which we had crossed on the way to Verny. the green patches of the meadows and forests, the blue blobs of the lakes, the yellow strips of shifting sands. The valley was cut in various directions by the dark chains of the mountain ranges which we had crossed. Their jagged outlines and weirdly shaped peaks gleamed in the bluish morning haze. From the lofty height, the town from which we had started out looked like a heap of swallows' nests which had been wantonly flung down at the very foot of the range.

Far below us to the south lay the dark waters of Lake Issyk-Kul, and farther on, bluish-pink and glowing with the morning light, stretched chain after chain of proud, mighty, snow-capped mountains, which gradually merged in the gigantic and majestic massifs of the Tian Shan range. And the stillness! Such stillness! A virginal, primeval stillness,

still unacquainted with the noise created by man. A stillness that seemed to ring with sound and subdued the heart.

In my subsequent life I have been more than once on the top of a mountain—in the Alps, the Caucasus, Japan, Altai, Mongolia, and Scandinavia. On those peaks, too, there was a stillness. But I have never again met with that profound fullness and that incomparable stillness, seemingly so filled with sound, which I experienced on the peaks of the Alexandrovsk range. Whether the stillness there was different or whether I myself was different, I cannot say.

We returned home from Verny by carriage. We covered the 2,000 versts of the return journey in relays, changing horses and carriage at each post-stage. My father was in a great hurry, so we travelled day and night. I was so brimful of the impressions of the past two months that I could hardly take in anything more. I slept a good deal on the way. Often during the night I would suddenly wake up for a moment owing to some particularly violent jolt. I would raise myself a little, open my eyes and listen. . . . Bright stars were shining in the sky. . . . The little bell hanging from the shaft-bow was ringing with an even beat, scattering melodious jingles in the darkness. . . . Father was snoring at my side. . . . Now and again the coachman on his seat broke into a cheerful whistle. Then I would sink back again into profound darkness; sound, young sleep closed my eyelids.

On the tenth day we reached Omsk at last. When I crossed the threshold of the house my mother threw up her hands and exclaimed: "Vanichka, how you've changed! You've become altogether different!"

My mother was right. It was not merely that I had grown taller, thinner, and burnt almost black by the sun. The important thing was that during my travels I had developed considerably in character, understanding more and feeling more deeply. But, most important of all, I had been for the first time in close contact with the people, the peasant masses, and the dull hard life of the soldiers. This contact left an ineffaceable impression on my mind and sowed in my consciousness the seeds of that respect and sympathy for the working classes which was to bear such rich fruit in the years to come.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In St. Petersburg

IN THE AUTUMN of the same year, 1893, our whole family moved to St. Petersburg. It came about like this: As the official formula stated at the time, my father was 'appointed to the Army Medical Academy to perfect his knowledge of the sciences'. The appointment was for two years. There was no sense in breaking up the family for such a long

period, so my parents decided to give up their Omsk home and settle in the capital altogether. For various reasons the calling up of the troops dragged on till late in the autumn, and when the approximate date of our departure was fixed, it turned out that the River Tura, on which stood Tiumen, the nearest railway station to Omsk, had become quite shallow and unnavigable. That meant that we would now have to get to Tiumen—a distance of more than 600 versts—by horse. It was no easy undertaking. We were already near the end of September—which is very late in the season in Siberia. The autumn rains were pouring down and the roads were turned into impassable swamps. At night there were light frosts. Our family now numbered seven, and the youngest member, my brother Mikhail, was hardly a year old. We had no small quantity of luggage and belongings with us. As we had no carriages of our own, we were obliged to travel post, as my father and I had done when returning from Verny. This meant that every thirty to forty versts, whatever the weather, the whole family, together with all the trunks and bundles, would have to be transferred from one carriage to another. The prospect was by no means a pleasant one. But we had to go, and we went.

We had at our disposal two large covered carriages, which were known in those days as 'tarantasses'. In the front tarantass sat my father and mother and the four youngest children—two sisters and two brothers. All the luggage was packed in the second carriage, and the orderly sat on top of it. On the strength of my being a 'big boy' I, too, was assigned to the second tarantass and had my permanent residence there. However, whenever I felt a little too bored on the journey, I went over on a visit to the front carriage. We drove slowly and there was no chance whatever now of galloping, as my father and I had galloped on the way from Verny to Omsk, doing 200 versts a day. We travelled only in the day-time. At the post-stages we stopped a long time. dinner was cooked, the children were fed, and every now and then little Misha was given a laxative. If we covered seventy to eighty versts in a day, we thought we had done very well. Moreover, the sky was lowering all the time, the rain scarcely ever ceased, and the horses sank up to their knees in the mud. This, of course, delayed our progress even more. It was only on the tenth day that our little caravan at last reached Tiumen, and when we drove up to the homely building of the railway station, we felt just as though we were 'in Europe'.

Of this journey in the autumn from Omsk to Tiumen I have retained one very vivid recollection, which might have come from the pages of one of Korolenko's tales.

We were approaching Tiumen, and there were only two or three more stages. Father was in a great hurry, and at every stopping-place he urged on the coachmen and ostlers. It was almost evening when we drove into a big village standing on the border of a dark wood. It was from this point that the dense forests began which stretched as far as Tiumen.

"Horses! And look sharp!" my father commanded, as he entered the post-station.

A tall, handsome old man with a long grey beard, who turned out

to be the post-house keeper, began trying to persuade my father to stay over till the next day.

"It's getting dark, sir," said the old man, gravely stroking his beard. "The forests here are enormous. . . . All sorts of people are roaming about. . . . It's an awkward time. Anything might happen . . ."

But my father wouldn't listen to any persuasion and categorically demanded horses. Then the post-house keeper told him 'as a secret', that about seven versts along the road to the next station there was a bridge over a little river where there had been some 'dirty work' going on of late: a gang of robbers were in hiding there and robbing the passers-by. Not long ago they had killed a merchant who was returning from the town.

"Your honour!" exclaimed the old man pathetically, making a final appeal, "you've got a beautiful lady and little children . . . God forbid, but what if anything should happen . . .?"

My father, however, remained unmoved. Whether he liked it or not, the post-house keeper had to obey. To argue with 'bright buttons' (my father was in army uniform) was out of the question in those days. The coachmen muttered something among themselves and set about their new job as slowly as possible. They, too, it appeared, did not want to go on account of the darkness. Twice Father had to go and round up the station master. When at last the tarantasses were standing at the porch and our belongings had been stowed away, the old man looked at my father very significantly and began in a timid voice: "But maybe you'll change your mind, your honour? We'll get the samovar ready. Matriona will bring some shanejhki . . ."

But my father only waved him impatiently aside and followed Mother into the tarantass. The coachmen growled and realizing that it was no use arguing with the 'gentleman', climbed sullenly on to the coachman's seat. A moment later our two carriages plunged into the twilight of the oncoming night.

The road led through a dense forest. On both sides the fantastic silhouettes of the trees were outlined in the darkness. The horses' hooves squelched loudly in the deep, sticky mud. The little bells under the shaft-bows jingled monotonously, and the coachmen whistled anxiously from time to time. Occasionally they lashed the side-horses with the whip and called out to encourage them: "Gee up, my beauties, keep it up!"

We drove along in this way for two hours. Meanwhile it had grown quite dark. There was a low, lowering sky covered with thick clouds. It began to rain and the drops pattered on the roof of the tarantass with wearisome monotony. Small, cold streams of water splashed from somewhere on to my neck. It was impossible to see a thing two paces ahead. The horses were going at a walking pace. The little bells were jingling unevenly, by fits and starts, as though stealthily.

All of a sudden the front tarantass, in which Father was riding, stopped. The second carriage, in which I was sitting, also stopped. The little bells suddenly became silent. There was perfect stillness broken only by the monotonous noise of the autumn rain. At once the atmosphere became uncanny and tense. What could be the matter?

The driver of the front tarantass climbed slowly down from his seat and began to walk round the carriage with a slowness that seemed to be intentional. He felt the sweating backs of the horses under the ridge-band, poked the handle of his whip into the muddy wheels, and for some reason or other tried to shake the body of the carriage. Our driver, following his example, had also climbed down and was standing about in a state of indecision.

"What are you stopping for?" my father asked, poking his head out of the rain-screen of the tarantass.

The driver of the front carriage grunted and said vaguely: "Well . . . it's . . . the horses are sweating a bit . . ."

"So they're sweating, eh?" said Father with some irritation. "Well, what of it? Let's get on. There's no sense in their getting cold."

"Sir! Your Honour!" the driver suddenly cried out agitatedly, having apparently decided that it was time to be quite frank. "Turn back! We're not going any farther!"

My father lost his temper completely and shouted: "Hold your tongue, fool! Are you scared of a crow?"

"Sir!" the driver appealed in desperation. "Don't put your soul in peril. I've left a wife at home, and the little ones are crying. What's going to happen if 'he' attacks us?"

The driver began to cross himself hurriedly. Meanwhile our driver also went up to the front tarantass and added his voice to that of his comrade.

"Back to your places!" my father shouted in such a voice that the children, who were sleeping on their mother's knees, woke up and little Misha began to howl.

The drivers recoiled dumbfounded and climbed back into their seats. In order to pacify them my father added in a calmer tone: "I've got a revolver."

"A livolvert, eh?" said the front driver reflectively, scratching the back of his head. "Then we've got to go?" he added hesitatingly. "Maybe the Holy Virgin will help us."

My father's revolver, as I knew perfectly well, was at the bottom of the big trunk on which I was sitting. The trunk was not only locked, but also tightly bound with straps. Nevertheless, the revolver played its psychological part: the drivers calmed down a little, climbed up to their seats and picked up the reins. Our tarantasses were standing, as it happened, at the beginning of the slope leading down to the little river which had such a bad reputation.

"Ah, well, come what may!" shouted the front driver in desperation. And with an angry whistle he whipped up the horses with all his might.

The three horses strained forward, reared up and dashed off. The driver stood up in his seat, lashed right and left with his whip and shouted something as though to encourage them. Our tarantass flew after the front carriage at the same speed. Some poles flashed by in the darkness, the planks of a wooden bridge suddenly began to clatter under the horses' feet, the wheels gave a sharp downward bound and the horses, galloping as madly as ever, carried us up the rise on the opposite side of the river and gradually returned to a more normal pace.

"The Queen of Heaven has brought us through!" exclaimed our driver with relief, crossing himself fervently. The river and the bridge were already behind us. An hour later we were sitting round a steaming samovar at the next stop and laughing at our recent excitement.

The rest of the journey to St. Petersburg was uneventful, but we travelled slowly and took a long time over the journey. Our route was as follows from Tiumen to Perm by railway, from Perm to Nijhni-Novgorod by steamer on the Kama and the Volga, and from Nijhni-Novgorod by rail via Moscow. The trains in those days went at a snail's pace, and the journey from Moscow to St Petersburg, for instance, took nearly twenty-four hours. The Volga was at its autumn low level. The big steamer in which we left Perm was unable to get as far as Nijhni-Novgorod, and at Kazan we had to transfer to a smaller steamer, but this ran aground on a sandbank and had to be rescued by a tug. In Perm we stayed three days with our relations on my mother's side, and in Moscow we also stayed a few days with the Tchemodanovs. All this, of course, did not make for quick travel. Altogether we spent about three weeks on the journey and did not arrive in St. Petersburg until the middle of September.

The immediate effect of the capital was to amaze me and set my head in a whirl. After quiet little Omsk, St. Petersburg, with its million population,¹ its broad, straight streets, many-storeyed stone houses, luxurious shop windows, beautiful bridges, its volume of horse-drawn traffic and numerous pedestrians (there, as yet, were no trams), made a striking impression on me. I was also tremendously excited by the Neva, where I could see with my own eyes real sea-going ships from all parts of the world. I often stood a long while on the granite quays of this wonderful river, watching the complicated manœuvres of the Finnish boats, the loading of foreign ships, the tiny Finnish steamers darting briskly in all directions like dark blue beetles.

In September, 1893, a few weeks before we arrived in St. Petersburg, the Russian battleship *Rusalka* had been lost without trace—with all its crew—in the Gulf of Finland. There was not a single survivor. Moreover, all attempts to locate the ship herself had been in vain. In those uneventful days this incomprehensible disaster was a first-class sensation. People talked about it a great deal, and the newspapers were full of it. I remember the circumstances of the loss of the *Rusalka* were discussed from every angle at the tea-table in our home and all sorts of theories were put forward to explain its disappearance. But no explanation was forthcoming, and the mystery remained a mystery. The *Rusalka* was only found forty years later, in our Soviet times, by *Epron* (The Soviet Ship Salvage Trust), but its strange fate had a very strong influence on my childish imagination, and still further sharpened my interest and enthusiasm for the sea and navigation.

On his arrival in St. Petersburg my father entered the Prince Oldenburg Institute of Experimental Medicine, with which the late I. P. Pavlov was closely connected. I remember how interested Pavlov was when I met him in London in 1935 and told him of my father's

¹ At this time the population of St Petersburg had only just passed the one million mark

connection with that scientific institution. As before, my father took me with him to the institute from time to time, but I didn't like it as much as our humble laboratory at Omsk. There were too many people and the field of my activity was too narrow, so I soon gave up going.

Our family settled in the Petersburgskaya Storona. Our flat consisted of three small rooms and a kitchen, on the third floor of a musty stone building. The windows faced the yard, but fortunately for us it was not one of those typical, well-like Petersburg yards, but was open on two sides and even ended in a little garden with a couple of flower-beds and a few stunted trees. For the sake of economy my mother did the cooking herself and only had one servant who cleaned the rooms and looked after the children.

As soon as I arrived in St. Petersburg I entered the Vedensky High School, which was only just round the corner from our flat. It was a big high school for those days. There were five hundred pupils and several parallel classes. In my class there were fifty pupils. The two years I spent at the Vedensky High School have left no vivid traces in my memory. In general I learnt easily and well, and was often top of my class, and when I moved up from the first to the second class I was the only pupil to do so without examination, moreover, I received the first prize. In those years I was particularly keen on geography, and not only knew the text-book by heart, but also read a good deal more about the subject than the syllabus required. I was also very fond of drawing maps, and although these were often far from perfect the drawing of them gradually stored up in my mind a good deal of accurate information about the configuration of coasts, the courses of rivers, the situation of towns and mountain ranges. This detailed geographical knowledge served me in good stead in later life.

Towards the end of my stay in St. Petersburg I began to take a great interest in astronomy. I was encouraged in this by a book called *Evenings of Astronomy*, written by a German, Professor Klein, which had just been translated into Russian and which my father had given me. I even met the translator of the book, a certain S. Sazonov, whom I regarded at the time as a demi-god dwelling on the heights of the literary Olympus. My passion for astronomy, however, reached its peak three or four years later, which I will deal with presently.

At home, on the insistence of my mother, I took violin lessons, but, as I have already mentioned, my heart was not in this instrument and I shirked any serious study in every possible way. When my mother scolded me for only playing for an hour or an hour and a half a day, whereas Birdie put in three hours at the piano, I answered provocatively with a phrase I had picked up somewhere: "Chopin did not allow his grown-up pupils to play more than three hours a day, so what can you expect of midgets like Birdie and me?"

St. Petersburg was my first introduction to the theatre. I remember how excited I was when I went with my mother to a matinée performance of Griboyedov's *Woe from Wit*. Both the play and the acting made an enormous impression on me, and it took me a long time to calm down afterwards. Later on I saw *A Million Torments*, *Dead Souls*, *Pushkin*, *The Two Waifs* by François Coppée, and several other plays.

My mother most often took me to the Kononov theatre—a small, bare theatre without an orchestra, but the acting was good and they put on good plays. It is remarkable, however, that my parents never once took me to the opera or to the ballet. As far as I can understand, following the severe traditions of their youth, they considered this form of theatrical art not to be serious enough. This gap in my theatrical education I amply filled up several years later in 1901 when I came back to Petersburg as a student.

It was during this period that my reading became more systematic and independent. My parents often gave me little books, mostly of a popular scientific nature. I have already mentioned Klein's *Evenings of Astronomy*. In the same category were a number of biographies of great scientists and inventors such as Galileo, Giordano Bruno, Stephenson, Fulton and others, in the popular series of "Lives of Famous People" issued by the publishing firm of Pavlionkov. It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of supplementary reading for the fresh, impressionable mind of a child. At the same time, however, I had a craze for reading of another kind, which has always delighted boys of from ten to twelve years of age—the stories of Mayne Reid, Fenimore Cooper, and Jules Verne. During the Petersburg period I was particularly keen on Mayne Reid, and at one time my imagination was so crowded with scalps, tomahawks, peace-pipes and war-cries that even when asleep I imagined myself to be either 'Firm Hand' or 'Fire Eye' leading the redskins to victory over the whites. The taste for Jules Verne I acquired somewhat later. I read over and over again almost all the works of that remarkable pioneer of scientific fantasy, but the deepest and most enduring impression was made on me by his two stories—*The Mysterious Island* and *The Adventures of Captain Hatieras*. I supplemented my reading by attending popular scientific lectures at the so-called Solyanoy Gorodok, which existed in Petersburg in those days. This was a well-organized educational institution, supported by the leading scientists and writers of the day. Lectures were open to all for a fee of five copecks. My father often took me to these lectures, and I sometimes wrote my impressions of them to Birdie. Amongst others I remember hearing one on 'Migratory Birds', another on 'Japan and the Japanese', and another on 'The Battle of Poltava'.

In St. Petersburg, too, I had my first childish love affair. I met my heroine in the shabby little garden of our block of flats. She lived in another wing of the same building. By some strange accident of fate she happened to be an English girl, although she had grown up in Russia and spoke Russian better than English. She was nine years old and her name was Alice, but we children called her Alya. I do not know what business Alya's parents were engaged in as they had died a year before we got to know each other. Alya was now living with her aunt, and the little girl's life was not an easy one. Her aunt did not like her, starved her and often beat her. Often Alya appeared in the little garden with a black eye or a bruise on her arm. There were days when she did not appear in the yard at all. This meant that her aunt had knocked her about so much that in order to avoid gossip she had locked her up in a room until the traces of the blows had disappeared.

Alya could not be called a pretty girl, but she had an intelligent, mobile face, lively blue eyes and a thin, elegant nose, which she screwed up so funnily whenever she said anything serious. Thin, with long chestnut hair in two long plaits, to me she seemed exceptionally charming.

From the start our childish romance took on a somewhat 'bird-like' character. I was very good at climbing fences and trees. Alya scrambled like a cat on roofs and branches. Usually when she came into the little garden we both climbed up on to the branches of two trees near to one another, and having settled ourselves comfortably began to hold long conversations. What did we talk about?

Most often we would set out together on a voyage in a wonderful ship which I had built, and of which I was the captain. We crossed seas and oceans and underwent thousands of the most amazing adventures. We were taken prisoner by the redskins, who wanted to scalp us, but thanks to our cunning and my eloquence the chief of the redskins ended by smoking the pipe of peace with us and we parted the best of friends. Then we turned up in Africa and encountered a lion which wanted to devour us, but I managed to shoot it in the eye in time with my revolver, and we took a tuft of its mane away with us as a keepsake. Then we were captured by cannibals; the whole tribe were howling and dancing round us, the fatal knives were already flashing above our heads, but Alya's beauty suddenly softened the heart of the cannibal chief, and he gave orders that we should be conducted with honours to the coast, where our fast vessel was waiting for us. Finally, after performing miracles of bravery and resourcefulness in all parts of the world, we returned triumphantly to Petersburg, and here wicked Aunt Katrin, who made Alya suffer so much, prostrated herself in abject shame at Alya's feet and implored her. "Don't be hard on me, Alichka! Don't bear me any ill will! From now on I'll wait on you as a faithful slave!"

Alas, however, real life too often snatched us away from the world of our imagination and forced us to come down to earth. This happened most often when Alya came out into the garden with the traces of her aunt's blows still fresh upon her. At such times she would be unable to keep back her tears; now and again they would sparkle in her lively eyes, and my ten-year-old heart would be filled with a keen feeling of pity for her and a mortal hatred for her tormentor. At such moments we discussed together, at great length and with the utmost relish, plans of 'revenge' on Aunt Katrin for all her wickedness.

"Alya, would you like me to go up to your flat and give Katrin a beating?" I said, looking fierce. "I've got a fine stick."

"No, no! Don't!" said Alya, who had a better understanding of the realities of life, and she gripped me by the arm. "Katrin will beat you, and it will only be the worse for me."

But I would not give in. I took the stick and ran up Alya's staircase. She ran after me, clung to my neck and implored me in such a heart-rending voice that my courage failed and I gave way.

"I'll tell my father all about it," I said, as a way out of the difficulty. "He's strong and he'll beat your Katrin."

But even this alternative did not appeal to Alya, as her uncle would

stand up for Katrin, and he was strong, very strong indeed. Then what was to be done? Alya placed all her hopes in an Aunt Mary, who lived in England but who was to come and take her away with her. But somehow Aunt Mary never came.

One bright spring day, of which there are not many in Petersburg, Alya came running out into the little garden, excited, gay and joyful. She was wearing a white lace frock with red ribbons, and she seemed to be the very personification of the bright spring day.

"Aunt Mary has come!" she shouted as she ran. "She's given me this dress."

And with that instinctive, roguish coquetry inherent in every representative of her sex, she twisted and turned in front of me, to show off her new frock.

"We're off to England to-morrow," she went on.

"To-morrow?" I asked, pricking up my ears. "Then you won't be coming to play any more!"

Alya was struck by this. The events of the day had evidently excited her so much that she had not yet had time to realize what they meant.

She was so glad to get away from wicked aunt Katrin, and the departure for England appeared to her in such very bright colours that my question now had the effect on her of a stream of cold water. Her liveliness vanished at once and a faint shadow came over her little face.

"Come and see me in England!" she exclaimed suddenly with relief, as though this were the solution.

"To England?" I repeated incredulously. "What am I going to do in England? I'm all right here."

At this time, of course, I could not foresee that in later life I was to have much to do with England, and so, being quite certain that I was right, I answered rather dryly: "No, it would be better if you came to us in Petersburg. I'll wait for you."

Any other solution then seemed to me fantastic. But it was no easy matter to convince Alya. Tugging distractedly at her white frock, she roguishly screwed up her slender little nose and kept repeating stubbornly: "You must come! We'll climb trees."

"But are you allowed to climb trees in England?" I asked doubtfully.

"Of course! Of course! How funny you are!" she said, laughing. This argument seemed to me worth considering.

"Well, if you're allowed to climb trees there," I said, "all right, I'll come." Thereupon harmony was restored.

A few minutes later Alya ran off home. Aunt Mary was leaving early next morning and had only let her into the garden to say good-bye to her friends. I never saw her again. For several days afterwards, going down into the garden to play with the boys, I had a strange feeling of emptiness, and all the while it seemed to me that Alya's slim little figure was just about to appear from round the corner. But this passed. Life healed my first emotional wound as later it has healed others of greater importance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

My Uncle Tchemodanov

MAZILOVO WAS A small village full of gardens not far from Kuntzevo in the neighbourhood of Moscow. At the edge of the village were two large, newly erected peasants' cottages with a certain pretentiousness calculated to attract summer visitors, the windows had carved shutters and there were small verandas at the sides. The houses were surrounded by leafy birch trees. Two families had come to spend the summer here—ours and the family of my mother's younger sister—Tchemodanov. There were a lot of us and all were very young—five children in our family and three in the Tchemodanovs; eight in all. In addition there were the two mothers and my mother's elder sister, Aunt Julia, who lived with the Tchemodanovs, making a total of eleven. But this was not all. True, it did not include my father who had stayed on in Petersburg for the summer to carry out some experiments on rabbits at the Institute of Experimental Medicine. But, to make up for this, our summer colony had another member, who used to pay us tempestuous flying visits. He spent the week in Moscow, but on Saturday evenings he would plunge into our quiet backwater, loaded with parcels, bundles and boxes, and set everything and everybody in a whirl. On Monday mornings he would leave us for six whole days. This unusual twelfth member of our summer colony at Mazilovo was Mikhail Mikhailovich Tchemodanov, the husband of my mother's younger sister, Aunt Lily.

On weekdays the life of our colony flowed along pleasantly but prosaically. We got up at seven in the morning, splashed about playfully at the washstand for a long time, and at eight o'clock we sat down to breakfast—an imposing spectacle: three women and eight children. We completely filled the little veranda of one of the houses, where we usually had breakfast and supper. The veranda of the other house was used for dinner. At breakfast the grown-ups drank tea with milk, but we children were given cold milk with tasty Filippov rolls called *kalachi*. After breakfast, Aunt Lily—a cheerful, good-natured woman with a ready sense of humour—looked after the household. She gave orders to the cook, made the beds, tidied the rooms, and mended the children's frocks and breeches. Aunt Lily was a charming woman and I was very fond of her. I often found myself wondering as to whom I would rather have for my mother—my own mother or Aunt Lily, and I could not honestly make up my mind.

Aunt Julia usually stayed on the veranda and read the paper. Afterwards she joined Aunt Lily and my mother, who often helped her younger sister in the house. Until dinner the three sisters chatted continuously about events in the city, about the children, their friends, the rise in the cost of milk, their husbands' business affairs, a new play at the theatre. Aunt Lily's outlook on everything was bright and optimistic, whereas Aunt Julia always saw everything in dull, pessimistic

tones. Poor Aunt Julia! In her youth she was amazingly beautiful, and even now at forty she was still very attractive. Her husband, a doctor under the *Zemstvo* (rural council), was the man who dipped me in the water of the Dnieper estuary when I was two. He had died of consumption a few years before. Aunt Julia had not married again. She had given up any personal life, and up to her death, which took place in our Soviet days, she never parted from the Tchemodanov family. These personal misfortunes left a deep impression on her whole psychology, and this was why, even at Mazilovo, she always saw the dark, negative side of things.

Meanwhile we children amused ourselves as we could. In our little group of eight there were three pairs of the same age. myself and Birdie, the eldest, aged ten and a half, my sister Yulenka and Birdie's brother Mishuk, who were both eight; my brother Tosya and Birdie's brother Sergei, generally called Gunya, aged six. With these two the pairs came to an end. Then followed the two youngest children of our family—my sister Valya, aged four, and my brother Minka, aged two. For games the combination was very suitable. We played in pairs and in groups. A twelve-year-old nurse-maid, engaged in the village, would either fuss about with the little children or herself romp merrily with the older ones. We made sand castles, built dams on the little brook, played touch-last, rounders and fox and geese. Sometimes we went for little outings in the fields and meadows round Mazilovo. It was delightful—sun, sky, the fresh smell of the grass, the gentle murmur of the breeze. We got sunburnt, tougher and stronger. Our legs were bruised and scratched, but on the other hand our little bodies were filled with glowing health.

Dinner was at midday and we had a good appetite for the *shtchi* (cabbage soup) or *okroshka* (cold kvass soup) and tucked into the delicious wild strawberries for dessert. Then we went back to the fields and to our games and romps till tea-time, and after that to bed and the sound, undisturbed sleep of childhood.

So the days went by. I do not remember having read much during that summer at Mazilovo. I simply vegetated, taking a rest from the high-school and storing up health.

On Saturday evening everything was instantly turned upside down when Uncle Misha, as we called Aunt Lily's husband, arrived like a whirlwind from the city.

Small and stocky, with twinkling brown eyes, an untidy black beard and a mane of black hair sticking up in all directions, Misha was liveliness itself, bursting with energy. He laughed loudly and infectiously and liked everybody round him to laugh too. He was always full of the most fascinating ideas and plans. His mind was always working at top speed like a motor. Rushing into the house and hurriedly kissing grown-ups and children, Uncle Misha immediately exclaimed: "Children, to-morrow morning we'll go fishing at the lake! I've brought the fishing-rods."

We responded, of course, with shouts of joy. Whereupon Uncle Misha went on: "Only don't let me catch anyone crying! If anyone cries I'll throw them into the lake and fish them out with the rod."

Our answer was a burst of laughter. Then he began teasing us either in a bunch or singly. He wrestled with me, gave little Minka a pick-a-back, bounced Yulenka and Gunya by the arm-pits, and performed all kinds of tricks that filled us children with the wildest delight.

Early on Sunday morning the elder children would set off with Uncle Misha to fish or go for a long walk beyond the Moskva river, or visit the fair which had just opened in a neighbouring village, where the roundabout was such fun and where you could buy the most delicious ginger-breads. These excursions with Uncle Misha were the greatest delight to us children. Then we went home, and after dinner Uncle Misha would have a snooze for an hour; after that either he told us some fascinating story, to which we listened with bated breath, or else he would draw for us. He had great talent, and before our eyes houses, fields, mountain ranges and seascapes came to life under his hand with extraordinary facility. Everything looked as though it were alive. I remember once it was a dull rainy day with heavy skies and driving clouds. Wet jackdaws perched mournfully in the trees. From the windows of our cottage we could see the rain-washed village track that had been churned into a sea of mud. Beyond it stretched a broad yellow field of ripening rye. Nature exuded gloom and boredom and I had caught the mood. We had not been out of doors, and Uncle Misha had been drawing for us all the morning. He glanced out of the window and muttered something to himself. Then he took a piece of drawing-paper and a box of paints.

"Uncle, do you really find it interesting to paint that dirty road?" I asked in surprise. "What can you see in it?"

"And why not?" said Uncle Misha. "Wait till I've finished."

He worked rapidly with his brushes, gazing fixedly out of the window from time to time. An hour later the picture was finished. When I looked at it, I gasped. I saw a charming landscape in water-colours, and even that muddy, churned-up road looked somehow interesting and profound. Uncle Misha smiled when he saw the effect his work had produced on me; then he said: "An artist can make a miracle of beauty even out of mud. In painting it is not only what you paint that matters, but also how you paint it. This applies to all art."

At the time I did not fully realize the significance of these words. How many times in later life have I had occasion to prove their profound truth.

Of that distant summer of happy childhood I have retained one particularly vivid recollection.

One day Uncle Misha took us on a long walk. We wandered for a long time through the fields and meadows round Mazilovo, picked our way through a dense wood sloping gaily down to the Moskva river, and walked a long way upstream to the village of Krylatskoye. On the way we called at a forester's cottage, and each drank a glass of milk and ate some tasty, fragrant black bread. In a little shop at Krylatskoye we bought some honey cakes flavoured with peppermint. Then we started off for home; when half way we decided to halt for a short rest beside the river. The four eldest of us were there. We wandered about barefoot and paddled in the water to our hearts' content and

amused ourselves playing ducks and drakes with pebbles on the surface of the water. When at last we thought it was time to be going on, Uncle Misha was nowhere to be found. At first we came to the conclusion that he was somewhere among the bushes on the river bank and would turn up any minute. But we were wrong. Quarter of an hour passed and there was no Uncle Misha. Half an hour—still no Uncle Misha. An hour and still Uncle Misha did not come. We did not know what to think. The evening was already drawing in, and we were still a long way from home. Moreover, we were not sure of the way properly, and besides it went through a thick dark wood, which was rather terrifying at sunset. But where could Uncle Misha have got to? We shouted to him, called him, begged him to answer, but it was of no avail. Anxiously we searched the nearest bushes and meadows for him, but without any result. It was just as though the earth had swallowed him up. Perplexed, alarmed and in low spirits, we four midgets held a 'council of war' on the river bank and summed up the situation.

"He couldn't have been carried off by devils!" I exclaimed half seriously, half ironically.

"Of course not!" said Birdie. "But what's to be done anyway?"

"What's to be done?" I repeated somewhat heatedly. "I'll tell you what's to be done. I'm the eldest—I'll lead you home. And you've got to obey me and follow me. Only don't dawdle and don't whimper. And when we go through the forest, you mustn't be afraid."

All three promised they would not dawdle, whimper or be afraid, and then our little party boldly set out. However, we had scarcely gone thirty paces when all of a sudden, at a bend of the path, Uncle Misha appeared, more untidy than ever, with his beard all ruffled, but it was Uncle Misha himself. We rushed towards him joyfully.

"Where have you been? What happened to you?"

Uncle Misha looked at us with a smile.

"I haven't been anywhere. I've been here all the time."

"But you can't have! We've been looking for you everywhere."

But Uncle Misha was perfectly right. Apparently he had conceived the idea of testing our juvenile courage and resourcefulness. While we were paddling in the water, he hid himself in the bushes close by, watching us and listening to what we said. He heard everything, including my remark that he could not have been carried off by devils. When we set off on the way home he decided the test was over.

"You've passed the examination, children," he said in a particularly gentle tone, and patted my head with unusual tenderness.

In fact, Uncle Misha was not only a wonderful uncle who brought so much happiness and gaiety into the country life of his children and nephews and nieces, he was a really remarkable, highly talented man, who, as often happened in old Russia, was unsuccessful in life, but who undoubtedly did his bit in preparing the revolution of 1905. And now, looking back, I want to give him his due.

Uncle Misha came from the forests of Viatka, where his father was



MY UNCLE: M. M. TCHEMODANOV

a village priest. He belonged to that breed of rebellious sons of the clergy who gave Russia Chernyshevsky and Dobrolubov. As a child I did not understand this; but now, remembering what Uncle Misha looked like, I am inclined to think that he must have had in his veins a considerable mixture of the blood of the local Voguli people. He was born in 1856. With scarcely any money he managed to finish the Viatka high school, paying his way by giving lessons and designing decorations for amateur theatricals. In 1876 he became a medical student at Moscow University, where he only graduated in 1882, having taken two years extra over the course. This delay was by no means due to laziness. On the contrary, it was the result of zeal—Uncle Misha's great zeal for the cause to which he gave the best that was in him—the struggle for the liberation of Russia from the yoke of autocracy.

Uncle Misha's artistic talent revealed itself in early childhood. He was always drawing at high school and in the University. He was endowed by Nature with the sharp, venomous pencil of a caricaturist from his early youth, and Saltykov-Shchedrin was his ideal and inspiration. Young Tchemodanov wanted to become in caricature what the great satirical writer was in literature. At first, fate seemed to favour him. His caricatures of Morkovnikov, a professor of chemistry whom the Moscow students were fighting towards the end of the '70's, played no small part in bringing about the professor's resignation, and at the same time brought the young artist into prominence. The result was an invitation to contribute to the humorous journals of contemporary Moscow. Early in 1880 Uncle Misha became a contributor to the satirical journal *Svet i Tieni* (*Light and Shade*), which was published by N. O. Pushkariov. He was very enthusiastic about this work, and side by side with his medical studies he would spend whole nights drawing striking, pointed caricatures on 'burning questions of the day'. There were many such questions, and the young artist's inspiration was inexhaustible. But the more malicious and merciless became the caricaturist's pencil, the more ferocious became the Russian censorship. And at last a thunderbolt was hurled from the height of the bureaucratic Olympus.

Not long after the assassination of Alexander 2nd by terrorists of the People's Will Party on 1st March, 1881, Uncle Misha published in *Svet i Tieni* a caricature which created quite a stir at the time. It depicted a large table covered with a green cloth, on which were the usual writing materials and a couple of ink-pots. A quill pen was stuck vertically in each of the ink-pots. Over the quills there was an inscription in the form of an ingenious scroll: "Our weapon for solving the burning questions of the day." At first sight it appeared to be a piece of innocent irony at the expense of scribbling bureaucracy. But if you looked closely at the quills and the inscription, you became aware of something altogether different in their outlines. You could see a gallows with a noose, and the silhouettes of soldiers beating drums, brandishing rods or with rifles at the ready. And these were the real 'weapons' of the Tsarist Government 'for solving the burning questions of the day'.

The aged censor who inspected the caricature failed to notice its subtle venom and passed it. It was the higher authorities who discovered the artist's insidious intention and were furious. The aged censor was removed from office a few months before qualifying for his pension, and the journal, *Svet i Tieni*, was suppressed. Uncle Misha had to leave Moscow in a hurry. On the subject of this episode he once said: "I agreed with Pushkariov to draw caricatures on burning questions of the day, and I nearly landed on the gallows!"

Uncle Misha, however, was not to be kept down. From Moscow he turned up in Tiflis, where at that time there was a humorous journal called *Falanga* (*The Phalanx*), which was trying to introduce political caricature into Russia. Tchemodanov rushed into the struggle with passionate enthusiasm. For several months he stung and lashed Tsarist reaction in the pages of *Falanga*, and then came another thunderbolt from the bureaucratic Olympus: the Governor of the Caucasus suppressed the journal "for submitting to the censorship articles and drawings unsuitable for printing and pernicious in trend". But the *Falanga* refused to die and came to life again a little later in the form of the *Gusli* (*The Dulcimer*). However, the censorship also refused to die, and very soon its sword of Damocles came down on *The Dulcimer* likewise. In July, 1882, it was silent for evermore.

Uncle Misha was back in Moscow. He was finishing his long-drawn-out studies at the University, but he now lived heart and soul in the editorial offices of the humorous paper *Budulnik* (*The Alarm-clock*), where at that time no mean company foregathered: V. Doroshevich, the poet V. Gilyarovsky ("Uncle Gilyai"), the poet P. Sergeyenko (afterwards a Tolstoyan), the young artist Levitan who afterwards became so famous, and Chekhov, who was then beginning to write under the pen-name of "Antosha Chehonte". Until the end of the 'eighties Uncle Misha, under the pseudonym of M. Lilin (in honour of Aunt Lily), carried on a furious war in the pages of the *Budulnik* against the grim political reaction which was setting in. His caricatures of this period form a satirical chronicle of contemporary Russian life. The stratification of the peasantry, the growing strength of the *bourgeoisie* in town and countryside, the savage arbitrariness of the autocracy, the impotence of the Zemstvo doctors and school-teachers in the struggle against popular ignorance, the cowardice and venality of the press—all this and much else was sharply and realistically portrayed in Tchemodanov's drawings.

But the storm clouds on the political horizon of Russia grew thicker and thicker, the social atmosphere more and more stifling, and the censors increasingly aggressive and ferocious. On the part of the reading public the demand was more for light, commonplace humour about catching husbands, baiting of the unfortunate mother-in-law, conjugal infidelities, etc. Uncle Misha was unable and unwilling to sink into this bog of baseness and spiritual poverty, and he decided to give up his work as a caricaturist. In one of his sketch books found after his death there is the following note: "I wanted to be a doctor, but it was my idea to heal social ills rather than individuals, and the instrument of healing I chose was not the scalpel, but the pen and pencil. . . .

Yes, the instrument of satire once attracted me I dreamt of being a *Shchedrin* in my work as a caricaturist. But a merciless censorship has clipped my wings, and being convinced of the futility, or at least of the infinitesimal usefulness, of my caricatures under the existing conditions of the censorship, I have laid aside my favourite instruments and exchanged pen and pencil for scalpel and stethoscope."

This is a tragic document, but it was dictated by the black reaction of the stormy days towards the end of the 'eighties, of that same reaction which also gave such sombre tones to Chekhov's writing.

Uncle Misha left Moscow and went back to his native province of Viatka, where he worked as a Zemstvo doctor in a remote village. Then he again returned to Moscow and for twenty-five roubles a month (!) became house-surgeon to the then famous Professor Sklifasovsky. At the same time he supplied brilliant illustrations for Professor Zernov's text-book of anatomy. Then he took up dentistry with fanatical enthusiasm. For a number of years he edited the journal *Odontologicheskoye Obozreniye* (*The Odontological Review*), took a higher course in dentistry, and gave lectures to various scientific societies and at conferences. At the same time he became one of the most popular dentists in Moscow. His waiting-room always had a long queue of patients—often some of the foremost people of the city—who would wait their turn for hours. The patients, especially the women, brought with them their work, books, knitting, embroidery, sandwiches and fruit, made themselves at home, got acquainted with one another, chatted, gossiped and flirted. The story went round Moscow at the time that a young man and a young woman who met in Uncle Misha's waiting-room, conceived such a passion for one another that a happy marriage was the result, and Uncle Misha gave the bride away at the wedding.

Tchemodanov was by nature a very untidy man, but he liked to work 'conscientiously', and took great pains with every patient. But as there were a good many patients and Uncle Misha was constitutionally incapable of keeping to strict hours, there was unimaginable chaos in the organization of his day. He received patients from seven o'clock in the morning and finished work late at night. He slept a few hours, and snatched a bite of food at odd moments—at any but the right time. He overworked himself to such an extent that when he sat down to eat alone (the whole family was already in bed) at two o'clock in the morning, he fell asleep at the table with his mouth still full of food. Aunt Lily used to tell a story that once a rat, of which there were many in the house, jumped on to the table and bit off half a meat rissole sticking out of Uncle Misha's mouth, while he was asleep.

And so the 'nineties went by.

Then the winds of revolution began to blow stronger than ever in the political atmosphere of Russia. The dark leaden vault of the sky began more and more often to show gaps through which the sun's rays poured down. The ground was quaking under the feet of Tsarism. Disturbances, unrest, and the will to fight for freedom were ever increasing in the masses of the people, especially in the ranks of the proletariat. Came the year 1905. And in the soul of Uncle Misha, as in a smouldering

fire under a layer of ashes, there again flared up that fighting spirit which had inspired him in his youth. He had never been a strictly 'Party' man. In the days of *Svet i Tieni* he had reflected the moods of the popular revolutionary movement, but even then he was not a 'Populist' in the strict sense of the word. In the years of storm and stress he became, like my parents, one of those Leftist, progressive, anti-Tsarist intellectuals who represented, if one may use the expression, the 'legal opposition' to the autocracy. And now, when the first thunder-claps of the revolutionary storm aroused Uncle Misha's old fighting instincts, he at first entered the arena as an individual revolutionary. He went to all the meetings, collected money and signed addresses and petitions. He spoke at conferences and demanded the liberation of those who had been arrested. But he did not join any one Party. Little by little, however, events and his own temperament began to urge him in the direction where the struggle against the autocracy was being waged with the greatest ardour. He got in touch with the Moscow Bolsheviks and became a supporter of the idea of armed uprising. Thereupon he again took up his sharp and murderous weapon—the pencil. He issued a whole series of skilfully-drawn political postcards, which dealt powerful blows at Tsarism, reaction, General Trepov, the 'reformer' Bulygin, and heaped venomous ridicule on the faint-hearted conciliatory attitude of the Liberal *bourgeoisie*. The series ended with a remarkable caricature that was truly prophetic: it portrayed the Tsar dancing on a mound of skulls, and, at the side, the same Tsar hanging on a gibbet. The caption ran: 'He'll dance to the end'. These revolutionary postcards were printed secretly at a Moscow photographer's. They were distributed in tens of thousands of copies and brought in a considerable revenue, which went into the funds of the Committee of the Moscow Bolsheviks and the political Red Cross.

But the tide of the revolution was now on the ebb, and Tsarism, though shaken, regained its power for a while. Savage reprisals were taken against all the enemies of the autocracy. Uncle Misha was one of the victims. Two raids on his house, arrested; the Butyrsky prison; croupous pneumonia contracted in the damp cell; release on bail when already a dying man; desperate efforts by family and friends to avert the fatal end. But it was too late! The Tsarist executioners had done their work well.

In January, 1907, Uncle Misha died; he was only fifty-two. His name deserves to occupy a prominent place in the history of Russian political caricature. The publication of a collection of Tchemodanov's best work would be a useful contribution to the bibliography of the development of Russian social-revolutionary thought.

I got to know him more intimately at Mazilovo when I was a little over ten years old. Later, right on up to the time when I entered the University, I often met him in Moscow and Omsk. And now when I recall my childhood and early youth, and try to decide which influences led me to become a revolutionary, I think with gratitude of Uncle Misha. The part he played in my intellectual development was by no means the least.

CHAPTER NINE

On a Convict Barge

IN THE AUTUMN of 1895 our family returned from Petersburg to Omsk. This time we went by the Siberian Railway, which that summer had been extended as far as Omsk. In the spring of 1896 my father was commissioned to accompany the convict barge plying between Tiumen and Tomsk, and once again he took me with him.

In those days the transport of convicts from European Russia to Siberia varied according to the time of the year. In the winter the gangs were taken by train to the last railway point—Chelyabinsk. From there they marched east by way of Omsk—Tomsk—Irkutsk—Chita and so on, as far as Sakhalin. In the summer the gangs went by train as far as Tiumen; from there they went by river to Tomsk, and then marched to Irkutsk, Chita, etc. During the summer two steamers, each of which had a convict barge in tow, plied regularly between Tiumen and Tomsk. These barges had cells for the confinement of prisoners, an open deck surrounded by an iron railing, accommodation for an escort of thirty-five men and two or three cabins for a small sick bay. The barge was accompanied by the officer commanding the escort and a doctor. The route from Tiumen to Tomsk was by way of the rivers Tur, Tobol, Irtysh, Ob, and Tom. The distance was three thousand versts. The whole journey took eight or nine days. During the summer season the barge made an average of seven round trips and, as I have already mentioned, carried up to a thousand convicts, who at that period were almost exclusively criminals. It was on one of these barges that I found myself in May, 1896.

I was twelve years old. I had just passed up into the fourth class at the high school and felt like a hero. I gazed at the world with eager, inquisitive eyes, and longed for new places, new people, unusual happenings and adventures. It may easily be imagined with what feelings I went on board the convict barge. I was full of excitement and expectation. I was already prepared for all the new, unusual impressions which I felt sure this remarkable summer had in store for me. Nor was I mistaken; there turned out to be plenty of impressions, and, as always happens in life, they were a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant.

I will begin with the unpleasant. First of all was the officer commanding the escort, Captain Feoktistov. I took a dislike to him at first sight. He was a tall, dashing-looking officer with a pointed waxed moustache and a handsome, insolent face, which always wore an expression of naive conceit and cocksureness. He clicked his heels smartly, was a heavy drinker, fond of his food, and liked playing cards and telling dirty stories. Women were his particular weakness, and he could talk about them for hours. At the terminal stops—at Tiumen and Tomsk, where our barge usually stayed a couple of days, Feoktistov always disappeared into certain suspicious haunts, from which, scarlet in the

face and half-seas-over, he had to be fetched in a cab a few minutes before the steamer left. On the journey he used to go out on the landing-stages, crack bawdy jokes with the peasants and patronizingly pinch the pretty girls. When he had had a drop to drink he would appear on deck with his tunic unbuttoned and, twanging a guitar, sing:

*I come out of my tent at night,
The moon is shining bright.
Tell me, wild wind,
How soon have I to go on duty?*

This thoughtful quatrain was repeated several times running. Then Feoktistov fell into a melancholy mood, assumed a languid posture and sang this mournful ditty

*The leaves are sere, the summer dies,
The hoar frost shines like crystal—
And Junker Schmidi would like to shoot
Himself with a pistol.*

At first Feoktistov tried to make friends with me. He used to invite me to his cabin and try to make me tipsy, but all his efforts were in vain. My father also kept aloof from him, so that in the end his only companion on the barge was an elderly medical orderly, a confirmed drunkard and gambler, with whom the bold captain usually played cards until the small hours of the morning.

Another unpleasant impression, though of a somewhat different kind, was made on me by the passengers on the barge—the convicts. Young and old, men and women, brazen and cowed, gloomy and gay, in fetters and without fetters—this noisy, drab, restless crowd filled the prison cells, shouting, quarrelling, whistling, crying, killing lice, lying on deck, playing cards and even sometimes knifing each other. I remember how during one trip a quarrel broke out among the convicts, and next morning an elderly convict, who was being transported to a settlement, was found dead with his skull fractured. In spite of all Feoktistov's shouts and blows, and the régime of strict confinement which he introduced on the barge after this incident, the culprits were never discovered; the ringleaders kept a powerful hold on the rest of the convicts. It was during this summer that my father carried out his measurements of 'criminal skulls', which I have already mentioned, and I helped him in his work. Every morning the soldiers of the escort brought a number of convicts to the sick bay for examination. Taken singly, they were human enough as individuals. Some of them even appeared to be pleasant and interesting. In the mass, however, the convicts made a depressing, tragic, and hopeless impression, and at the same time they aroused in me—at the time I was quite unable to understand why—a feeling of moral embarrassment, as though I were to some extent responsible for their unhappy fate.

These were the shadows. But there was also light, and plenty of it. I had no sooner stepped on board the barge than my old passion for

the water, ships, and navigation revived. I soon made friends with the crew and especially the helmsmen. There were fifteen men in the crew and they all came from the same place—the village of Istobienskoye in the province of Viatka. I do not know why, but it so happened that in those years all the West-Siberian steamers plying on the waters of the Ob and the Irtysh were manned by natives of this famous village or its neighbourhood. The winter they spent at home in the province of Viatka, and in the spring they set out for the rivers of Western Siberia where they worked till late autumn. The 'Istobenski' formed a clan of their own. They stuck close together, jealously guarded their 'monopoly' and combined to squeeze out any 'outsider' who attempted to penetrate their stronghold. It was the same on our barge. The captain, Mikhail Yegorovich, a stout, stockily-built man of fifty, with a real Russian face fringed with a wide greying beard, did not make any great impression on me. We were always friendly on the surface, but there was not much warmth. On the other hand, I was very fond of the two men who took turns at the helm, and one of them—Vasili Goriunov—won my heart right away. He was an elderly man with bristling hair, a melancholy face, and a network of deep wrinkles on his forehead. At first glance he seemed to be a regular misanthrope, but one had only to see him smile—a childish, open, charming smile—to realize that one was dealing with an exceptionally good-natured and upright man, who had suffered a lot in his life. I could not help feeling that Goriunov had some unexpressed inner sorrow, but it was not until later on that I realized the cause of it. His comrades said in a tone of respect that 'Vaska read books', and they often asked his advice about various perplexing questions. Indeed, Goriunov was very fond of reading. He had in his cabin a number of cheap popular publications, mostly dealing with history, geography, and astronomy. He was particularly interested in the great navigators, explorers, and discoverers of new lands. For some reason his imagination was especially fired by Vasco da Gama. He loved to repeat his name at unexpected moments, listening to its sound as though it were music. "Vasco da Gama!" he would say, as though at random, cocking his head on one side. "He was a real navigator! There was a man for you!"

With the tacit consent of the captain I soon became a sort of volunteer cabin-boy on the barge. I explored all the nooks and corners, learnt the ropes, mastered the secrets of signalling, how to throw the 'line', how to throw out and catch the mooring-ropes,¹ and how to drop and weigh the anchor. But what I liked most of all was to stand with Goriunov at the wheel watching the ever-changing current of the river and 'helping' him to steer. Gradually I got the knack of it and became so adept at

¹ In those days the system of mooring used on the West-Siberian steamers was as follows. When the steamer approached the river bank, a long thin rope with a weight on the end was thrown from the steamer's side to the bank, where it was caught by a longshoreman, who quickly hauled it in. The thin rope itself was attached to a heavy cable with a noose. After hauling in the thin rope, he then hauled in the heavy cable and slipped the noose over a post sunk into the ground, or over any convenient stump. The steamer was hauled into the bank and made fast. The thin rope was called *legost* ("line"), and the thick cable was known as *chalka* ("mooring-rope")

handling the wheel that Goriunov would sometimes let me steer the barge. Of course he never left me alone at the wheel, that would have been too risky, but he often used to say to me. "Come on, Vaniushka. You have a go!" And when, terribly proud of myself, I took my stand like a real sailor at the wheel, Goriunov would move over to a corner of the wheel-house, roll himself a cigarette and stand for a long time smoking and gazing pensively in front of him at the swirling, darkening waters and the steep wooded banks that glided slowly towards him.

The surrounding country was wild and impressive: huge rivers, dreamy taiga, the endless line of the river banks, the pale northern skies, whose stars at night were so clearly reflected in the darkened surface of the water. And hardly a human being in sight. From time to time a small fishing village would appear beneath a steep bank; or there would glide past a group of conical Ostiak reindeer-skin tents, nestling on the flat shore of a sandy island, or a wisp of blue smoke would rise above some lonely hut. And again there would be water, forest, sky, islands, flocks of birds, desolate banks, wild animals. Once I remember a she-bear with several cubs ran out of the taiga down to the water's edge, and stood a long time gazing in surprise at the passing steamer. And so it went on day after day. We seemed to be sailing on endlessly.

The village of Samarovskoye has remained in my memory. Here at the junction of those two mighty streams—the Ob and the Irtysh—the ground forms a sharp mountainous headland covered with a wild pine forest. My father and I climbed to the top of the headland by means of a shaky wooden flight of steps specially constructed in 1891 for the 'heir to the Throne'—afterwards Nicholas II—who was passing through Samarovskoye. In front of us was a wonderful scene. To the left stretched the broad, yellowish-grey ribbon of the Irtysh, several kilometres in width, while to the right flowed the mighty, dark brown waters of the Ob. Both these huge streams united, but for a long distance, as far as the eye could reach, one could clearly see the line of division of the two waters. To me the river here seemed boundless. From the top of the cape all that could be seen was water, water, water. Here and there flat islands overgrown with willows appeared like faint shadows . . . and farther on, at the very horizon, one could just distinguish the bluish outline of the opposite bank. It was exactly like a sea.

"How many versts is it across?" my father asked, waving his hand in the direction of the river.

The elderly peasant who had accompanied us spat deliberately, rubbed the bridge of his nose, shrugged his shoulders, and said. "I reckon it's a good eighteen versts. . . . And don't you try going into the water. It'll suck you in at once."

For long we could not tear ourselves away from this magnificent sight.

Once a day our steamer, the *Galkin-Vrassky*, put in at one of the larger settlements to take on firewood. For two hours the crew hurried backwards and forwards between the ship and the shore, wheeling load after load of fuel. The passengers—of whom the steamship sometimes carried a few—and the 'free' inhabitants of our barge (that is to say, the captain, the doctor, the medical orderly, the crew, and the soldiers of the escort)

took the opportunity to stretch their legs. They wandered about the village and the neighbourhood, saw the local sights, and bought milk, shanghai, berries, fish, and roast game from the buxom local girls at an improvised market.

My father often had work of his own to do at the landing-stages. In those days the population was very badly off for medical aid. For hundreds of versts around there was not a single doctor or hospital. The population along the banks of the river knew that the convict barge always carried a *dokhtoer*. No sooner did we touch the bank than a long queue of patients lined up for Father. Strictly speaking, of course, he was under no obligation to attend them, and some of his colleagues on convict barges simply sent the sick people who turned up at the landing places unceremoniously away. But Father thought that his medical knowledge was given him in order to serve the people—and for this reason, at the landing-stages, our barge was turned into a doctor's surgery filled with people. Father did the best he could for them. There were some remarkable cases.

I remember how at the village of Demyanovskoye, on the Irtysh, Father was called to a difficult child-birth. Mother and child were in danger of death. Father fought a stubborn duel with Nature. Hour after hour went by. The firewood had already been loaded and the steamer was ready to leave. The captain sent one messenger after the other to Father, asking him to come back to the barge. But Father each time sent them back with the same answer. 'In a minute', and stayed where he was. The result was that the steamer was delayed three hours, but mother and child were saved.

I remember another incident, which took place at Surgut, a tiny little town at the junction of the rivers Vakh and Ob. An elderly Ostiak trapper, who had been severely mauled by a bear in the forest a couple of days before, was brought to Father. He had a terrible wound: the entire scalp had been torn from the top of the man's head by the infuriated bear, and its great claws had left deep marks in the man's skull. His head was a mass of congealed blood, bound up with filthy, sticky rags. The Ostiak nearly fainted while Father was removing the rags from the wound. Father examined the wound, cleaned and washed it and treated the skull as best he could, bandaged the head and finally gave the patient some simple instructions as to how he was to carry on. But Father was far from being optimistic.

"I doubt whether he will get over it," he said, when the Ostiak was led away from the sick bay.

However, he did get over it! It was a real miracle, which was greatly helped by the hunter's strong constitution. Two trips later, the Ostiak, now recovered and cheerful, came to the barge again to offer his thanks to Father. He brought with him as a 'present' a sackful of cedar-nuts in the cone. Not to accept the 'present' would have been a mortal insult to the hunter; moreover the nuts turned out to be excellent, and Father and I cracked them constantly for the rest of the voyage to Tomsk.

During that same stop at Surgut, Father had an unusual visit. The local priest, Father Evlampy, came and asked him for some medical

supplies from the medical stores of the convict barge. Father, who as a general rule had no time for the clergy, at first adopted a dry, official attitude. However, this visitor was unlike the usual type of priest whom we had been accustomed to in Omsk, and the conversation took on a more natural and friendly tone. It appeared that Father Evlampy had been living at Surgut for over fifteen years, and was devoting all his energies to his work among the Ostiaks. His parish was gigantic—over a thousand versts in diameter—and the bulk of the population were Ostiaks—a small Finnish tribe who had lived from time immemorial in the Ob basin. Father Evlampy knew the Ostiaks intimately. He had learnt their language, and studied their customs, morals, and religion. The Orthodox missionaries of those days usually treated the ‘infidels’ they were enlightening with arrogance and contempt. There was nothing like this about Father Evlampy. On the contrary, he spoke about the Ostiaks with great sympathy, almost with tenderness.

“I marvel at the strength of their native instinct,” he told us. “I often go for a ramble in the forests in the neighbourhood of Surgut. I take some little Ostiak children with me. We go two or three versts, sometimes more. I get lost and can’t find my way home. But not the children! I can always rely on them. They can always find the way back.”

Evlampy had much to say about the difficulties of his life and work. Surgut was a real back of beyond. The little town had a population of a thousand, who were almost exclusively fishermen and trappers. There was a district police officer, a church, a parish school, a Government vodka shop, and a prison. There was no telegraph. In the summer contact with the outside world was maintained by the river steamers. The rest of the year the little town was entirely cut off from the world. Father Evlampy visited his entire flock at least once a year. He would take a *kayuk* (a large rowing-boat, with a small windowless cabin) and set off on his long journey, visiting the Ostiak settlements one after the other. The distances between the settlements were enormous—one or two hundred versts and more. He stayed a week or two in each settlement, holding services, marrying, christening, reading burial services (*post factum*), preaching ‘the word of God’, giving medical aid, and settling disputes and quarrels. The Ostiaks were officially reckoned to be members of the Orthodox Church, but Father Evlampy did not conceal the fact that they believed more in their heathen gods than in the Holy Trinity.

“The most difficult thing,” said Evlampy, “is the River Vakh. I have to go up it for about a thousand versts. The country is wild, uninhabited, and cold. In the autumn the ice-floes always begin on the Vakh. When the ice drives down the Vakh, it’s the end: the whole of the Ob is blocked with ice. And the people along the Vakh are like the river—sombre, morose, and stubborn. They don’t trust anybody. At the least thing they disappear into the forest. And who’s going to find them there? Mother-taiga is endless. It’s about a thousand versts from Surgut to the Yenisey—a sheer stretch of taiga without a break. Even the Ostiaks only roam about on the edges of the taiga. It’s seldom that anybody goes farther than one hundred to one hundred and fifty

versts from the course of the rivers. Beyond that what is there? Nobody knows. No man has ever set foot there."

I went ashore with my father to see Father Evlampy off. It was already getting dark. The crew had finished loading the firewood, and the steamer was getting ready to sail. In the tiny Surgut houses dim little oil lamps were being lighted one after the other. Beyond the wretched little town, with its grey wooden houses, stood the wall of the boundless taiga, dark and motionless. The first stars came out in the sky. All was quiet, gloomy, majestic, primeval. And only the little steamer, lost in the boundless waters, with its electric lights, the clank of its engine, and its bustling crew, marred the harmony of the scene. Here, it seemed like an interloper from another world—a world of movement, thought, struggle, and civilization. It seemed to be the harbinger of another age altogether—the age of steel and oil, iron bridges and steam hammers. The contrast was remarkable and I could not help sensing it, in spite of my youth.

"But aren't you tired of living in this dead place?" my father asked Evlampy.

Evlampy sighed, glanced at the bulky parcel he was holding in his left hand (medical supplies from the barge), and answered in a peculiar tone: "What is a dead place? To me this dead place is full of life."

Then he added in a more ordinary voice: "Twice I've been offered a transfer to Tobolsk, but I refused it. Everything is so complicated there. It's so difficult for a simple man to live there. I'm better here! That's how I feel about it"

We said good-bye. Evlampy strode off towards the town, and soon his tall, slim figure disappeared in the darkness.

That evening I thought for a long time about this strange, unusual priest. My childish mind did not realize that Father Evlampy was a late survival of a long past historical epoch, of that epoch when the old Orthodox Church still had its idealistic ascetics. Now the Church no longer had any use for such ascetics, and it sent them to such remote places as Surgut. That evening I was unable to formulate my thoughts clearly, but I felt instinctively that I was face to face with some new riddle of life, to which I had no satisfactory answer.

CHAPTER TEN

I Meet the Political Prisoners

EARLY ONE MORNING in August, when I ran into the wheel-house as usual, Gorunov said, with a note of mystery in his voice: "We've got 'politicals' on board. In cell number seven."

"You don't say so!" I said in surprise. "How many of them? A lot?"

"There don't seem to be many of them," Gorunov said vaguely. 'They came on board yesterday evening at Tiumen."

We had left Tiumen at daybreak and were making our way with difficulty among the shallows and sandbanks of the almost waterless Tur which was at a very low level. Every now and then a sailor in the bows threw a sounding-pole into the water and kept calling out to the pilot. "Six and a half. . . Six. . . Five and a half. . . Five. . ."

When he called out five, the captain shouted down to the engine-room: "Dead slow!" and we moved forward at the speed of a tortoise.

But from the moment I heard Gorunov's news I lost interest in all this. I had already heard about the 'political prisoners' from my parents and my uncle Tchemodanov, but I had only a vague idea about them. Moreover, I had never seen them myself. And now I had the opportunity of meeting them face to face. One can easily imagine my excitement and the impatience with which I looked forward to seeing such unusual people.

Everyone on our barge was already aware of the presence of the 'politics'. The news had gone round with lightning speed. I rushed to my father and told him what I had heard. He looked up from some notes he was making and said quietly: "Yes, we've got a party of twelve 'politics' on board."

At the same time a peculiar expression came over his face, but he said no more and went on with his work. Nevertheless, I realized at once from his manner that he was very interested in our unusual passengers, and that secretly he sympathized with them.

The same day I saw the 'politics' for the first time. After dinner they all came out on to their deck, which was fenced round with an iron grating, and settled down to rest. I stood close to the grating and tried not to miss a single gesture or movement. There were twelve of them—eleven men and one woman. I have no recollection of their names (my father told me much later that some of them were political exiles, who were going into exile under false names), nor do I remember any other particulars about them. Apparently they were all members of the Populist movement and rather critical of social-democracy, which was making rapid strides in those days. Anyway, when they were talking among themselves I several times heard them refer with a sneer to the 'factory boiler' and 'pupils of Capital'. I was particularly interested in two of them—the woman and a tall, grey-haired old man, whom I thought of as 'Grandfather'. The woman, whom they called Zinaida Pavlovna, was the housekeeper of the party. She was over forty, wore convict's dress, and spoke sharply as though giving orders. It was impossible to call her good-looking, but there was a great deal of strength of will and energy in her swarthy, expressive face with its intelligent, mocking eyes. 'Grandfather' was the exact opposite of Zinaida Pavlovna. He was all kindness and gentleness. He liked to make peace all round and had something nice to say to everybody. He was a wonderful raconteur, and one couldn't help listening to him. He had an excellent memory. He was well read and could quote long verses and even whole poems by heart. He was also fond of singing;

he himself had not at all a bad voice and was a skilful choir leader. In this respect all the other politicals willingly followed his lead. They often sang, especially towards evening when the sun was sinking lower and lower beyond some distant headland and setting the horizon ablaze. They would sing Russian and Ukrainian songs: *Dubinushka; Not the genile rains of autumn; The broad Dnieper; Far, far rolls the steppe beyond the Volga*. They also sang revolutionary songs, which I heard then for the first time and one of which in particular impressed itself on my memory: *Oppressed by heavy bondage*.

All the 'politicals' seemed to me quite remarkable people, but with 'Grandfather' I soon formed a warm friendship. I simply doted on him, and probably no lover ever looked forward so eagerly to meeting his beloved as I when I waited every day for the 'politicals' to appear on deck after dinner and I could run to the grating and talk to 'Grandfather'.

Apparently 'Grandfather' returned my affection, for he never grew tired of talking to me, exchanging ideas and impressions, and especially telling me stories. He told me many things—about his own life, foreign countries, the Russian countryside, the hard life of the peasants, the injustice of the authorities and the cruelty of the landowners. He knew how to clothe his ideas in such a clear, simple and intelligible form that my childish mind drank up his words as sand drinks up water. Zinaida Pavlovna, when she saw me at the grating, would often call out to 'Grandfather', with an indulgent grin: "Well, propagandist, here's your little friend!" Whereupon 'Grandfather' would answer in the same tone: "We're going to talk sense, Little Mother, we're going to talk sense" And then we would start endless conversations.

One day 'Grandfather' asked me if I had heard of Nekrasov.

"Of course I have!" I said. "At home we've got a complete edition of Nekrasov's works."

I thought for a moment and told him that I knew "The Peasant Children", "Grandfather Mazai and the Hares" and a few others

"Do you know 'The Railway'?" he asked.

"No, I don't."

"What a pity!" he said reproachfully. "It's one of Nekrasov's best poems" Thereupon he started to recite it from memory. He recited well, and "The Railway" made a deep impression on me. I was particularly struck by these stanzas:

*Cruel hard the work was, Vanya,
More than a man's strength could bear.
But there is a merciless Tsar in the world,
Hunger—that is his name.*

*He is captain of the ships on the sea,
He herds people into the workshops,
He leads armies and stands behind
The backs of weavers and stone cutters.*

*It was he who drove here masses of people,
Setting them a terrible task:*

*They brought life to these wastes
Where many found their graves*

*Straight is the road, and narrow the track,
With its posts, rails and bridges
All along it too lie Russian bones,
Vanichka, can you tell how many?*

I jotted down this remarkable poem on a scrap of paper as 'Grandfather' recited it, and learnt it off by heart the same day. The whole evening I could think of nothing but "The Railway", and even in my sleep I saw the crowds of stooping workers 'from the Volkov, from Mother Volga, from the Oka'. From all sides they were coming towards me, waving their arms menacingly, but suddenly 'Grandfather' appeared, took me by the hand and lifted me up on to a height, and all around, as though at the touch of a magic wand, everyone began to laugh and to sing a wonderfully beautiful song,

"The Railway" played an important part in my early development. It shaped and strengthened many of the thoughts and feelings which had been aroused in me from the time I had met the 'politicals'. It provided an 'ideological foundation' for that instinctive sympathy with the people which I had already experienced.

"How great and fine they are, the Russian people!" I would often think. "How much they have suffered! How I would like to help them! But how can I do it?" To this last question I had as yet no answer. How, indeed, could I have had?

Everything comes to an end—and so at last did our voyage. I said good-bye to the 'politicals' at Tomsk with great emotion. I felt I was parting with the dearest friends I had in the world. As the little group was being led off the barge, I rushed up to 'Grandfather' and threw my arms round his neck. Tears came into my eyes. 'Grandfather', too, was touched. The Tomsk escort officer, who was present at this scene, frowned contemptuously and drawled: "How senti-men-tal!"

'Grandfather' waved him aside as though he were a tiresome fly, and turning to me, said gently: "Well, Yaniushka, good-bye! I've grown fond of you. Something will come of you. When you grow up, you'll tread the Vladimirka road like us."

He kissed me and stepped quickly across to where the whole party of prisoners were lining up.

"'Grandfather'! 'Grandfather'!" I called out, as I ran after him, "what is your name? I will write you a letter."

"What is my name unto you?" he declaimed, half in jest.

No doubt he was referring to his assumed name, but I did not understand this at the time.

The order was given and, with fetters clanking, the whole party of prisoners, in their grey convict's dress sewn with different coloured patches, set off along the dusty road to the town.

'Grandfather's' prophecy was fulfilled sooner than might have been expected. Exactly ten years later I found myself in the same barge and on the same route, only on the other side of the grating.

The return voyage from Tomsk to Tiumen was a dismal one for me. After saying good-bye to the 'politicals' I felt extremely depressed—melancholy and dissatisfied. Nothing interested me any longer. In order to cheer myself up a little, I asked Feoktistov to lend me a set of the contemporary magazine *Nabliudatel*, and buried myself in a fantastic story of the life of the ancient inhabitants of Mexico. However, even this did not help me much.

Moreover, autumn was already beginning to come into its own. The rain was pouring down. All day long the sky was covered with leaden clouds. At night it was so pitch-dark that I couldn't understand how the pilot could find the channel. Sometimes strong winds blew, the broad surface of the river tossed with foaming waves, and our *Galkin-Vrassky* would try to shelter in the narrow channels or behind the long flat islands that stretched along almost the entire course of the Ob. On the Irtysh there were thick fogs—it was often impossible to see even the steamer's lights from the barge. On the Tobol the fog nearly caused a collision between our barge and the Kornilovsky steamer *Otiez*. On the Tura, the *Galkin-Vrassky*'s engine broke down just as we were approaching Tiumen. For some days we were at a standstill, until in response to a wire the *Fortuna* arrived, and after a long delay brought us to our destination. All this, of course, was not calculated to make one feel particularly cheerful.

It was during these dismal days that I found out the secret of my friend Goriunov.

We had just left Tiumen. The weather was calm and warm. The steamer glided silently along the crystal-clear waters of the Tom. In front of us were the mighty expanses of the Ob—wind, storm and fog—but here in the south everything still breathed of summer with sunshine, flowers and a clear blue sky. Goriunov was on night watch, and I stayed in the wheel-house till it was almost daybreak. There were just the two of us; everyone else on the barge was asleep and the occasion was conducive to a frank heart to heart talk.

"They say they're 'political prisoners'", Goriunov remarked suddenly, as though in answer to his own thoughts. "But they're good people. You can't get away from that. It's senseless, that's what it is."

"But do you know any 'politicals'?" I asked quickly, struck by what my friend had said.

During the whole of the time that we had 'Grandfather's' party on board with us, Goriunov had not said a word about the 'politicals', now he suddenly began to talk about them. I was all ears.

"I've come across some," he said, rather unwillingly.

"Where? When?" I asked eagerly, feeling that I was on the verge of discovering a fascinating secret. "Tell me about them, Vasili, please do."

For a moment there was silence in the wheel house. In the darkness I could not see Goriunov's face. Then again I heard my friend's voice: "Why talk about it? It's all over and done with."

"No, no, Vasili," I insisted, "do tell me. It's very interesting."

Again there was silence in the wheel-house—a long silence this time. The thudding of the steamer's paddle-wheels resounded in the stillness

of the night, and echoed loudly from the high banks of the river. Goriunov took a couple of puffs at his cigarette and said at last: "Well, since we've started on the subject. . . ."

He heaved a deep sigh, as though he were pushing heavy stones out of the way, swung the wheel round and then began.

"It happened twenty years ago. I was quite a young lad at the time. On the feast of the Intercession they married me to Paranka, a girl in our village. She was a lively girl, up to all sorts of mischief. . . . And then spring came and the sowing had to be done. . . ."

He paused for a moment as though cleaning the rust off his long forgotten memories. Then he went on in a somewhat livelier strain: "Our village wasn't a very big one, but it was a fair size. There were about a hundred homesteads. . . . We farmed the land, and in the summer some of us worked on the river steamers. Our village was not far from Istobenskoye, so of course we worked with the Istobenskoyans on the Ob and the Irtysh. Our family was a huge one. father, mother, grandfather and ten children. I was the eldest. I followed the plough. We lived a poor sort of life. There was not enough land, and plenty of mouths to feed, and on top of that Father fell ill. Sometimes we had nothing to eat."

Goriunov heaved another sigh, gave a turn at the wheel and then went on with his story.

"Spring came and we had to do the sowing, and drive the cattle out to pasture. About a verst from our village there was a little stream. We had to water the cattle there. There was no other water in the neighbourhood. And this is what happened. The old people said that when they were freed from serfdom, the little stream was allotted to our village. Well, the local landowner and the authorities put their heads together. They did something to the papers. the land went to us, but the little stream and the land along it for about seven hundred feet or so—Swine Hill—we used to call it—went to the landowner. It was a dirty trick. If you wanted to water your cattle, you had to pay the landowner. Our peasants grumbled a good deal. They said they had been tricked. But what could we do? Every year we had to pay. Well, that spring things were pretty bad all round. It was a bad year, nobody had any corn, they were starving. The old landowner died and a new one came. He called us 'Swindlers! Robbers!' He said: 'You've robbed my father! You used to pay a rouble each for the water, now you'll have to pay two!' The peasants were outraged. 'We robbed him?' they said. 'He's robbed us!' If he's come to make a fool of us, we won't pay anything at all! It's our land. It's our stream! We've put up with enough!" And what do you think they did? They rounded up all the cattle belonging to the whole village and drove them down to the stream. They didn't pay the scoundrel a single copeck."

"And what happened after that?" I asked anxiously.

"After that . . . well, you can imagine what happened after that. The landowner went to town to complain. They sent the gendarmes along. There were about thirty of them. All on horseback. The whole village was assembled and the gendarmes were lined up in the street. The landowner shouted. 'Hand over the ringleaders!' He pranced

about, went as red as a lobster, and his eyes nearly burst out of his head. 'Hand them over' he shouted. 'If you don't hand them over, we'll shoot!' Our peasants were a bit frightened at first. They backed against the wall and silently looked down at the ground. But there was one very poor chap—we used to call him 'Tikhon without Trousers'—he came up and shouted. 'You so-and-so, have you come here to fleece us?' And as soon as he began to bawl at them, others grew bolder and shouted 'It's our stream! They've stolen the papers! We've been cheated!' The fat was in the fire. The peasants got worked up and were going to set about the landowner. But the gendarmes got busy. They charged their horses at the peasants, lashing about them with their whips and brandishing their swords. The women cried out and the children howled. I don't remember what happened after that. I was told afterwards I went quite mad, rushed at a gendarme, snatched his whip and lashed at him with it."

In short, what happened in Goriunov's village was what the official language of the time called an 'agrarian disturbance'. What happened afterwards was the usual thing in such cases. The peasants did not hand over the 'ringleaders', but the gendarmes arrested about fifteen individuals at random and took them away to the town. Goriunov was one of those who were arrested. They were kept in prison for eight months. Then they were tried. Three were acquitted and the rest were sentenced to various terms of hard labour or deportation. On account of his youth, Goriunov was let off with deportation. In the depth of winter, he was sent with the other prisoners from Viatka to Eastern Siberia on foot. In those days convicts were not transported by barge. After long marches and much hardship Goriunov at last reached his place of exile—somewhere in a remote corner of Zabaikal region. There he spent four years, and it was there that he came across the 'politicals'. They taught him to read and write and put the first political ideas into his head.

"The 'politicals' are good people," said Goriunov once again, as though summing up. "They work hard for the poor man. Only somehow it doesn't lead to anything."

"But what happened afterwards?" I interrupted impatiently.

"A proclamation was issued. They set me free and I came back home."

Goriunov's voice seemed to break down, and silence reigned in the wheel-house once again. All that could be heard was the heavy thudding of the paddle-wheels.

"At home everything had gone to rack and ruin," Goriunov went on, after pulling himself together. "My father died soon after I was arrested. My mother could not cope with the farm. She sold the horse and cow and went begging. Three of the younger children died of a fever. The others went out into the world."

"But what happened to Paranka?" I asked.

Goriunov was silent again, and his silence lasted so long that I gave up hope of an answer. I realized that I had touched on a very sore spot and was even sorry I had asked the question. But once again he overcame his emotion and said with a hint of bitterness in his voice: "They

told me Paranka had got mixed up with the landowner's son. Of course he only wanted to have a bit of fun with her, and when she became with child he drove her out. She went and drowned herself in the little stream. That's how it is with women!"

After this Gorunov hated his native village. He went to Istobenskoye and worked as a sailor on the Ob. He had been doing this for fifteen years now. In Istobenskoye he had a wife, two sons and a daughter. They were going to school and he hoped that his children's lives would be better and happier than his own had been.

At the end of August I began to think about going home. My father had to stay with the barge for the whole of September, but I had to get back to Omsk for the beginning of the school term. On the other barge, which had been covering the same route as ours during the summer, was a doctor from Omsk named Borislavsky, whom my father knew. With him on the barge were his two sons, the eldest, Kolya, who had only just finished school, and the younger, Petya, who was in the same form with me. It was arranged between our parents that I should join the Borislavskys, and that all three of us, under the leadership of seventeen-year-old Kolya, should return to Omsk in the steamer *Sarapuletz*. Somewhere between Tiumen and Tomsk, not far from Samarovskoye, I transferred to the Borislavskys' barge which was going to Tiumen, and at Tobolsk the three young travellers were put ashore to wait for the *Sarapuletz*, in which we were to return home up the Irtysh. All this was settled down to the last detail, and our parents regarded the plan as the height of perfection.

No sooner did our little party set foot in Tobolsk than all sorts of unexpected misadventures began. We arrived at Tobolsk in the morning and, according to the programme, we were to leave the same evening for Omsk on board the *Sarapuletz*. At dinner-time, however, the news arrived that the *Sarapuletz* had had a breakdown and was in dock for repairs and that its regular trip to Omsk had been cancelled. Greatly discouraged, we went round all the Tobolsk landing-stages in order to find out how soon there would be another steamer sailing in our direction. It turned out that the Zlokazov Company's steamer *Fedor* was leaving Tobolsk for Omsk next day. Moreover, we were told that as it would only be towing one barge, it would reach Omsk in five or six days.

This news was both pleasant and unpleasant—pleasant because it relieved us of a long wait for a steamer, unpleasant because it put us in a very awkward position with regard to money. Our parents had provided us with second-class tickets on the *Sarapuletz* and a certain amount of ready cash which was quite enough to pay for our meals even in the steamer's buffet. But the *Sarapuletz* belonged to the Kurbatov Company, and tickets for it were not valid for the *Fedor*, which belonged to the Zlokazov Company. Therefore we had to buy new tickets and also to take a room in a hotel for the night. The young travellers held a council of war, and after reckoning up our resources we found there was only enough money for third-class tickets. Accordingly we bought three third-class tickets to Omsk, and took one room for the three of us in a

very suspicious-looking hotel with the high-sounding name of 'The Europa', and ordered tea for two. Then we went for a stroll round the town. We inspected the market, climbed the hillock where the citadel once stood and which was now covered with Government institutions, took a look at the town park, admired the monument to Yermak and ended up foregathering with a group of Tobolsk high-school boys, with whom we played several games of skittles. That night we slept like the dead, and next day embarked on the *Fedor*, which had just arrived. On closer acquaintance, the *Fedor* turned out to be a cargo boat. It had no passenger buffet whatsoever, and the third-class accommodation was exceedingly primitive. But it could not be helped, so we settled down in the stern by the paddle-boxes, while Petya was unanimously appointed our business manager. Koyla had the cash, and when we checked up on it before the steamer sailed we found to our alarm that we had only 2 roubles 83 copecks left. For three young travellers with good appetites this was a very small sum indeed, but we were not downhearted. We knew that whatever happened in five or six days' time we should be eating our fill at home.

In the evening we were all fast asleep under our coats. Early in the morning I was the first to get up and go on deck to wash. I glanced casually at the shore. Heavens, what was this? We were moving along at a snail's pace, not more than four or five versts an hour. I looked astern and gasped behind the steamer, one after the other, trailed three enormous, heavily-laden barges! This upset all our calculations. I rushed to wake the others. "Koyla! Petya! Get up!"

They were no less astounded than I had been. In order to clear up the situation we got hold of the first mate and asked him when the *Fedor* expected to reach Omsk. He looked thoughtfully at the bank, the river, and the sky, and said: "In ten or eleven days' time. If all goes well."

The situation was only too clear. We were going to be at least ten days on the steamer, and all we had in our pockets was 2 roubles 83 copecks! In other words, we could only spend 9 copecks a day for each one of us.

We economized drastically. Petya gave us weak tea to drink, doled us out a piece of bread each, and cooked an 'omelette' in water as there was no butter. The result was such a horrible mess that I couldn't even get it into my mouth. But Petya was full of praise for his dish, although he avoided eating it himself. After that we began to forage for something cheap and satisfying. Whenever we stopped, Petya would go ashore and wander round the cottages and market stalls looking and sniffing at everything, and in the end he would come back with a couple of wheaten loaves, a bag of cranberries, or a potful of small fish. It may have been cheap, but as for its being satisfying we had our doubts. In order to allay the feeling of hunger, we drank tea from morning to night—fortunately hot water was free—and reinforced it with a hunk of bread, a piece of melon or a handful of berries. This diet was not without some effect on our health, for by the end of the journey we were all much thinner and had lost colour. Our mothers simply gasped when at last we arrived home. But youth makes light of hardships, and we

were young, gay, and full of energy, like young colts galloping about the fields with their tails in the air.

Our hunger was soon accompanied by cold. The *Fedor* not only towed three barges, but also stopped a long time at the landing-stages. At one place it took two days to unload one barge, and at another it was a whole day loading up again. We had already moved from the paddle-boxes closer to the engine. It was noisy and smelt of oil, but on the other hand it was warm. During the long stops the boiler fires were let out, and on these nights we shivered in our light school uniforms. Autumn was drawing on and the first frosts had already begun.

But what did that matter when one was twelve or thirteen? We ran about the steamer, played around with the crew, bathed at the landing-stages and went on the river in punts and into the woods to pick mushrooms when there was a long stop. Sometimes, in a more serious mood, we recited verses and told one another stories.

Kolya, who was of a somewhat dreamy nature, was fond of philosophizing. The day before the *Fedor* was due to drop anchor in Omsk, he took us to the bows, and putting on a serious face, and in the style of a real 'high school Socrates', announced. "And so, friends, let us sum up and draw our conclusions. During this summer each of us has made six trips in a barge. Each round trip amounts to at least six thousand versts. Consequently, all six trips together make up a minimum of thirty-six thousand versts. The circumference of the globe via the Equator is equal to thirty-six thousand versts. This means that each of us this summer has been round the globe. I congratulate you, comrades!"

Petya and I were greatly impressed. The idea had never occurred to us. We glanced at each other with pride. See what the Siberian scale of distance meant!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In Search of the Lights of Life

KOROLENKO HAS A beautiful poem in prose called 'Little Lights'. On a dark night the writer is floating down a sombre Siberian river. Suddenly, at a bend of the river ahead, a little light flashed at the foot of dark mountains. It was a clear, bright flash and quite near. In reality it was still a long way to the little light, but the impression was deceptive: it seemed as though it needed only another two or three strokes of the oar to reach the spot. Yet he went on rowing for a long time along the dark, inky river. For a long time yet the ravines and rocks loomed up, moved towards him and receded into the boundless distance, but the little light was still ahead of him, twinkling and alluring—so near and yet so far. The writer frequently recalls that dark river and this living light. Many are the lights, he says, both before and since, whose seeming

nearness has allured me, and not only me. But life still flows on between those gloomy banks, and the lights are still far ahead. And again one has to strain at the oars . . . And yet, and yet there are lights ahead!

When, after many years, I now look back on the period of my life I am describing, I can see clearly what I was unable to realize properly at the time, and that is that the summer I spent on the convict barge was an important turning-point in my development. It marked the end of my childhood and the beginning of adolescence which gradually passed into young manhood.

Until that summer I had simply been a child, who had no problems and who eagerly, easily, and joyfully drank in the manifold impressions of life—drank in exactly expresses it, as sand drinks in water. After that summer my inner life became much more complicated. Of course, the process of elemental, mechanical registration of impressions continued, but at the same time, with increasing force as the years went by, some kind of inner unrest made itself felt. I began to seek after something greater, higher, above the motley turmoil of everyday life. It was a seeking after some single principle which would introduce a certain system and definite pattern into the chaotic piling up of facts and phenomena, which is called life. In short, it was a seeking after those lights of life, of which Korolenko speaks so eloquently; those lights of life which alone are capable of giving meaning and a purpose to man's existence. In the beginning this searching was weak, vague, and indefinite. There was a good deal of hesitation and contradiction in it. Little by little, however, it became deeper, more conscious and more mature, and in the end led me to what I became in later years when I was fully grown up. Of course, in spiritual processes of this nature it is difficult to specify the exact dates of the passage from one stage of development to another. this usually takes place gradually and imperceptibly. However, if one had to draw a line dividing my childhood from my boyhood and youth, it would have to be drawn through the summer of 1896.

The first stage in my search for the lights of life was under the sign of 'handicraft'. There is, obviously, in my nature some inherent inclination to manual labour. I have already mentioned how passionately fond I was at the age of seven or eight of making toy ships. Later on, I was always sticking something together, sawing, planing, and cutting. And after I returned from the convict barge, I felt a spontaneous urge to learn some handicraft. Of course, I continued to attend the high-school, to learn my lessons, solve problems and do written exercises. But it was all the tiresome routine of everyday life. I merely went about it in a mechanical way without any interest or enthusiasm. But handicraft was something altogether different. I was aglow with it, I craved for it. It became the central focus of my being.

At first I became an apprentice in a small joiner's workshop not far from our home, and went there every day for a couple of hours after school. In my room at home I set up a carpenter's bench and acquired hammers, planes, chisels, and other tools and, to the great distress of my mother, I littered the floor with sawdust, shavings, and bits of wood.

Little by little I 'got my hand in' so well that I began to make small tables, stools, shelves, boxes, and other simple objects of the woodworker's craft. I only failed to master the art of varnishing.

My enthusiasm for carpentry continued for several months. Then somehow it began to wane, and I became interested in metal work. I now went every day to the locksmith's workshop and began to learn the secrets of working in metal. In addition to the carpenter's bench my room now had a locksmith's bench, at the back of which were files, soldering irons, drills, instruments for cutting iron, and other appurtenances of a full-blown locksmith. No doubt the litter and rubbish in our house was still further increased, but on the other hand I learnt to solder, to tin, to thread screws and to make round tin saucepans.

At first, in both the joiner's and the locksmith's workshops, they adopted an ironical attitude towards me. They grinned, shook their heads and said: "The young gentleman's a bit queer".

But later on they got accustomed to me. I entered into the life of the workshops and took up their interests. And once, with my father's help, I even obliged a slack payer to pay up at once for the furniture which had been made for him in the workshop. This greatly increased my prestige, and after that they began to look on me as a real friend and a very useful one as well. In fact, I greatly enjoyed mixing with 'working people', drinking tea with them, chatting and sometimes bandying rough jokes. As yet there was nothing political in this contact: we were living in a remote part of the country, the times were unenlightened, and in reality the working people themselves, with whom I had to do, belonged to the category of domestic craftsmen. Nevertheless, contact with the working world brought a new, fresh current into my life. It put before me a whole series of puzzling questions, which at that time merely increased my unrest and to which I was to find the appropriate answer much later on.

But even the locksmith's trade did not satisfy me for long. At that period of my life I was generally unable to settle down, and frequently changed my enthusiasms and occupations. I have already mentioned our Omsk acquaintance Simonov, who kept a stationer's shop in Tomskaya Street. In addition to all his other accomplishments he was also a self-taught bookbinder. One day I found him engaged in this work. I began to take an interest in it, and Simonov willingly undertook to teach me all the tricks of the art of book binding. I soon mastered it and became more firmly attached to it than to my other handicraft interests, perhaps because it had to do with books. Besides all the other things in my room, there was now the further addition of bookbinding benches, cardboard, glue, leather, coloured paper and printed calico, and my mother was almost driven out of her mind by the amount of mess made. Gradually I attained a fairly high degree of skill in bookbinding and even began to present my friends—Birdie, for instance—with books I had bound myself.

In my subsequent life I have more than once had occasion, though at long intervals, to practise the craft of bookbinding. The last occasion was during the winter of 1919-20 in Mongolia, when my expedition for

the economic exploration of Mongolia was wintering at A. V. Burdukov's settlement at Hangeltsyk. I found there a set of bookbinding tools, and memories of my childhood came back at once. In my spare time there I went in for bookbinding, and also gave instruction in it to some young men who were staying at the settlement.

What is the explanation of my enthusiasm for handicraft? I think it was based on a half-childish, semi-conscious protest against environmental conditions, a protest against the traditional, firmly established order by which a doctor's son must inevitably attend a high-school, go to a university and become a civil servant or an intellectual, cut off from the broad masses of the people. My parents not only did not hinder, but even to a certain extent encouraged my fondness for manual work. In this they revealed their old 'Populist' sympathies and habits of thought.

Soon, however, simple handicraft ceased to satisfy me, and I took up electrical engineering. My father took out a subscription for me to *The Practical Electrician*, published in Moscow—a thick volume with plenty of illustrations and drawings, and I began to make all sorts of tests and experiments. They were as varied as was possible with the restricted means at my disposal in Omsk. Of course, I exploited my father and not infrequently got the materials and substances I needed from his hospital laboratory, but many things were simply unobtainable in such an out-of-the-way place as the 'capital of the Western Siberian Governor-Generalship' was in those days. My letters of this period to Birdie are sprinkled with urgent requests to 'buy for me at Ferein's' (a big chemist in Moscow), and to send me this or that chemical or electro-technical preparation, without which I could not carry on my work. I remember I had the greatest difficulty in getting coal. There was no coal at all in Omsk, where wood was the fuel mainly used, and it was impossible to get coal from Moscow by post. Owing to the lack of coal I was obliged to give up the idea of carrying out a number of experiments. However, in spite of all these difficulties, in the course of a few months I made great progress in electrical engineering. I fitted the house up with electric bells, which were a great novelty in Omsk in those days. I installed in my room a tiny electric lamp, which was fed from an accumulator I had made; and I even went in for electroplating. Once when, in the presence of our cook, I turned a copper five-copeck piece into a shining nickelled coin, the poor woman was quite shocked and anxiously asked: "Will they send you to prison? They say people who make counterfeit money are not let off lightly."

However, I did not stick to handicrafts very long. From carpentry and metal working via electrical engineering, I underwent a rapid evolution towards science in general and astronomy in particular. Astronomy was, in fact, the strongest and deepest enthusiasm of this period of my life. I have already related how in St. Petersburg I was interested in Klein's *Evenings of Astronomy*, but it was only now, in Omsk, that my interest gradually turned into a real passion. I collected a fairly large library of books on astronomy, including the best Russian and translated works of a popular character such as Mayer's *Creation of the World*, Newcomb's *Astronomy*, the works of C. Flammarion, etc., and becoming

engrossed in them I was carried away into the infinite spaces of the universe. I was very fond of Schiller's poem, 'The Infinite':

THE GREATNESS OF CREATION¹

*Upon the wing'd winds, among the rolling worlds I flew,
Which, by the breathing spirit, erst from ancient Chaos grew;
Seeking to land
On the farthest strand,
Where life lives no longer to anchor alone,
And gaze on Creation's last boundary stone.*

*Star after star around me now in its shining youth uprears,
To wander through the Firmament its day of thousand years—
Sportive they roll
Round the charméd goal.
Till, as I looked on the deeps afar,
The space waned—void of a single star.*

*On to the Realm of Nothingness—on still in dauntless flight,
Along the splendours swiftly steer my sailing wings of light;
Heaven at the rear,
Paleth, mist-like and drear;
Yet still as I wander, the worlds in their glee
Sparkle up like the bubbles that glance on a sea!*

*And towards me now, the selfsame path I see a Pilgrim steer!
"Halt, Wanderer, halt—and answer me—What, Pilgrim, seek'st thou
here?"
"To the World's last shore
I am sailing o'er,
Where life lives no longer to anchor alone,
And gaze on Creation's last boundary stone."*

*"Thou sail'st in vain—Return! Before thy path Infinity!"
"And thou in vain!—Behind me spreads Infinity to thee!
Fold thy wings drooping,
O Thought, eagle-swooping!—
O Fantasie, anchor!—The Voyage is o'er:
Creation, wild sailor, flows on to no shore!"*

I learnt this poem by heart and remember it even now. It expressed so well my mood at that time. True, the end of the poem was rather disappointing. I had no desire whatever to fold my wings and cast the anchor of my thought. But the infinitude of the universe was impressed upon the mind in this powerful and stirring form.

¹ English version by Lord Lytton.

However, my enthusiasm was not confined to reflections on the grandeur of the universe—I not only read books on astronomy—I resolved to become an astronomer myself. For this purpose I forced myself to take an interest in mathematics, although from a child I had never liked that subject, and I began to make a special study of it. I subscribed to *The Guide to the Heavens*, and every evening I carefully studied the vault of the sky by the maps in the supplement. I calculated the course of the earth round the sun and drew up tables of the time necessary for the passage of a ray of light from the sun to each of the planets of the solar system. I wrote a short *Guide to the Study of the Planets*, in which I described in detail the characteristics of each planet and of each of their then-known satellites. And finally, I began to observe the stars myself. With great difficulty and various artifices I managed to procure a small refractor, or more precisely, a large spy-glass with an inch and a half object-lens magnifying twenty-five times. I attached the spy-glass to a home-made stand, and after that I felt I was almost an 'amateur astronomer'. In the evenings I would take my instruments up to the attic of our house and till late into the night would travel, or rather crawl with them, about the twinkling vastness of the starry heavens. In the summer when we went into the country, the conditions for observation were even more favourable. The telescope was set up somewhere in the garden or in a field, and I was able to turn it in all directions and fix it at any angle. Any failure in my observations, owing to a cloudy sky or atmospheric disturbances, etc., depressed and annoyed me. On the other hand, every success filled me with joy and satisfaction. This I read in one of my juvenile diaries under the date of 14th July, 1899:

To-day I am in a very good mood: I have been observing the moon and have seen many details which I had not seen before. It seems to me that the crater Theophilus is deeper than the craters Cyril and Katherine, but Katherine is deeper than Cyrl. I shall continue my observations.

Similar notes occur fairly often in my diaries of that time. Birdie, who was always fond of teasing me a little in those days, used to laugh and say: "You're so taken up with astronomy and electrical engineering that you can live a hundred days without food and drink."

Soon, however, my home-made refractor ceased to satisfy me, and I longed to buy a really good instrument—a small three- or four-inch refractor, which would enable me to make more serious observations and also give me the right to call myself an 'amateur astronomer', a title which in those days was the object of my most ardent dreams. On the recommendation of S. Sazonov, the translator of *Evenings of Astronomy*, I entered into correspondence with L. G. Malis, the astronomer of the University Observatory in St. Petersburg, and requested his patronage and advice in this exciting enterprise. Malis turned out to be a very considerate man and sent to me in my remote Omsk abode long letters, which filled me with delight. And with what delight! In his letters he addressed me, a boy of fourteen, as 'Much respected Ivan Mikhailovich' (just like a 'grown-up'!), and furthermore, he gave me a

lot of interesting information on the subject in which I was interested. He advised me to get a telescope from the firm of Reinfelder und Herschel in Munich, and to order the stand with a clock-work device from the firm of Horn and Thornwhite in London.

Then with the Munich telescope and the London stand, Malis ended his letter, you will have an excellent instrument (and all for about 280 roubles) which will raise you to the rank of an 'amateur astronomer'.

I was delighted. Could anything be more wonderful and attractive than to have a fine instrument and be an amateur astronomer? My imagination was filled with dreams of the Munich telescope. I already saw it before my mind's eye, I fixed it on the stand, I wound up the clock-work device, I carried out remarkable observations with it and, of course, I made some extraordinary discoveries . . . I not only dreamed. I entered into 'diplomatic negotiations' on the subject with my parents. And the negotiations were far from being unsuccessful . . .

However, I never got the Munich telescope! Why? No doubt financial reasons had a good deal to do with it. Two hundred and eighty roubles was a big sum for my parents, which it was no easy matter for them to find. However, I am convinced they would have found it in the long run, for my father greatly encouraged my scientific inclinations, and my mother also was fairly sympathetic towards them. It was not so much a question of money as of my own moods.

The course of every man's life is determined by two fundamental factors. his innate qualities and the environment in which he is moulded and lives. My innate qualities, so far at least as I am able to judge them on the strength of more than half a century of experience, would appear to have cut me out for the work of a scientist, probably a scientist and popularizer of science, for I possessed from an early age the ability to expound various complicated questions in a clear manner. And if it had been my fate to live in some peaceful and orderly age, it is highly probable that all my work would have passed between the scientist's study and the lecture-room of a university. It is also quite probable that I might then have realized my childhood's dream and have become a real, professional astronomer. However, it was the will of Fate that I should be born in an exceptionally stormy, dynamic age—an age of great historical change, of the twilight of Capitalism and the rise of Socialism. And this played a decisive part in determining the course of my life. the heated atmosphere of a revolutionary age easily turns potential scientists into militant bearers of the new social idea. And that is just what happened to me.

While I was carrying on 'diplomatic negotiations' with my parents, corresponding with foreign firms about the much-desired telescope and seeking for ways to cover the necessary expenses, the curve of my mental development took a fairly sharp turn. From the time I was moved up into the sixth class at the high school, that is to say, from the winter of 1898-99—I shall have more to say about this in detail later on—my intellectual interest in scientific matters gave place more and more to questions of a social-political nature. Not that I gave up science alto-

gether—oh no! I still continued to take an interest in astronomy right up to the time I left the high-school, but science was gradually being pushed into the background, and the foreground of my intellectual life was more and more taken up with the problems of the struggle against the Tsarist régime that held the country in its grip. In such conditions it is not surprising that the plan to acquire a Munich telescope, for the realization of which I should have had to mobilize all my available energy, remained in the end nothing but a plan.

No, I did not become a scientist. Instead, I followed another path—the path of a revolutionary. And now, looking back at the road I have travelled, I have no regrets for what happened. On the contrary, it would have caused me deep regret, if in an age like ours I had remained aloof from the great battles for Socialism.

Anyway, my early enthusiasm for science, and for astronomy in particular, did not pass without leaving its mark on my intellectual development. It is not merely the fact that during the whole of my subsequent life I retained a deep love and respect for science and that even to this day I am unable to see a telescope or a spectroscope without experiencing a certain excitement. What is more important is the fact that this half-childish contact with the problems of the world of creation, with the riddles of the universe and the fate of the solar system and the earth, gave wings to my thought and captured my imagination. It gave boldness and daring to the flight of my scientific fantasy. Undoubtedly, a well-controlled fantasy and a scientific imagination well grounded in fact are the necessary elements of real scientific creativity. Without them there would be neither discoveries nor inventions. I do not mean to suggest that in the course of my life I have enriched humanity with any new conquests in the field of science or technical knowledge. Of course, I have done nothing of the sort. The point is that the development of scientific imagination is useful to any man and in any field of activity. I have experienced this more than once in life—both in the years of 'underground' revolutionary activity and in the years of travel and diplomatic work.

I recollect how in 1919–1920 at the request of the All-Union Consumers' Association (Tsentrinosoyus) I undertook to carry out an investigation into the economic resources of Outer Mongolia, now the People's Republic of Mongolia. Having travelled under very difficult conditions throughout almost the whole of the country, whose territory is greater than that of England, France, and Germany put together, I collected what at that time was valuable material on the questions in which I was interested. Moreover, I ascertained that in spite of its vast area and considerable mineral wealth, Outer Mongolia was, and would probably remain for a long time, not very suitable for extensive settlement. Why? The answer to this question is to be found in the physical characteristics of Outer Mongolia. By the nature of its relief, Outer Mongolia is a high plateau, up to 1,500 metres above sea-level, situated in the centre of an enormous continent and surrounded on almost all sides by high mountain ranges. These ranges cut off the moist winds from the oceans, and as a result the climate of Outer Mongolia has a dryness and severity which hinder any wide development of agriculture for

instance. In my report on the expedition I conscientiously summed up all the facts I had then observed and drew the proper practical conclusions from them.

Here, properly speaking, I might have come to a full stop. And this is what I did in my report. But my mind, having been fertilized in the distant days of my childhood and early youth by contact with the world of cosmic problems, could not be satisfied with the mere statement of facts. It ran on ahead and tried to look into the future.

Very well, I often thought to myself—as I crossed the Mongolian steppes on horseback—at present Outer Mongolia, because of its climatic conditions, is a semi-desert. But what do these conditions depend on? On two factors: the great height above sea level and the presence of mountain ranges along the frontiers of the country. It is impossible to do anything about the first, but what about the second? Here the position is somewhat different. True, at present the mountain ranges impede an adequate penetration of the moist ocean winds into the interior of Outer Mongolia, but what if sufficiently wide and deep 'windows' could be cut in these ranges, through which the moist winds could reach the interior of the country? Would it not help to change the climate? Of course it would. Would it not open up the possibility of developing agriculture on a big scale in the country? Of course it would. Consequently, the theoretical solution of the problem of the climate of Mongolia is there. It is merely a question of its practical realization. Of course, in the conditions of capitalism and even in the conditions of the age of transition from capitalism to socialism, all thought of the possibility of gigantic works of such a nature is utopian. But later on, in the conditions of a developed communistic society, would this be so impracticable? And so have we not the right to regard Outer Mongolia as one of the reserves of humanity, which will be able, in a few generations' time, to develop to the full its rich potentialities?

The thoughts aroused by this flight into the obscurity of the future would not rest; as though on wings, it soared ever higher and forward. Or let us take, for instance—I went on thinking—the northern spaces of Siberia which comprise nearly a quarter of the whole territory of our country. What are they at present? Frozen deserts, almost unsuitable for life and, in any case, affording no opportunity for mass settlement. Must it always be so? Of course not. Why not dig a mighty network of heating canals under the frozen surface of the Arctic tundras? In order to operate this gigantic 'central heating' system, why not make use of solar energy or the heat of the molten masses in the bowels of the earth? If one succeeded in carrying out something of the sort, the tundras would thaw, and it would be possible to grow oranges and grapes at Yakutsk. Thanks to the artificial alteration of the climate, huge territories would be opened up for the use of mankind. Once again, however, in the conditions of capitalism or of the transitional epoch, it is ridiculous to talk of the possibility of such a grandiose undertaking. But later on, in the conditions of a developed communistic society, why shouldn't it be possible? And so the tundras, too, may be regarded as one of humanity's potential reserves.

My thoughts, however, would not rest even at that. In my youth

I read that sooner or later—in hundreds of thousands and millions of years—the sun will be extinguished, and all life will cease on earth. Theoretically, this is undoubtedly so. At present, with our existing habits of thought, with our technique and scientific knowledge, it is unthinkable to us that even under those conditions humanity will become extinct. And is it really so? Will it not be possible to struggle against the doom threatening humanity? Is it not probable that human intelligence, which will have passed through the school of countless generations of communistic society, will be able to find ways and means to preserve life on earth even after the extinction of the sun?

It was also in Mongolia that I returned to the poetic enthusiasms of my childhood (of which I will speak later on) and wrote a dramatic poem entitled "The Heights". It is not for me to judge the artistic merits of this work—very likely it hasn't any merits at all—but it serves to illustrate the idea I have just expressed. One of the heroes of the poem says, among other things:

*I believe in man! Mother Nature
In a great gust of passion deep-inspired
Gave birth to him, creation's wondrous pearl,
Endowed him with the gift of deathless Reason
And over herself gave him the ruling power.
Since then down distant ways in age-long darkness,
Holding his brow aloft with quenchless pride,
Man has gone on for ever higher and forward.
From victory to victory he has gone,
And there has been no end, nor can there be
An end to all the triumphs of his daring!
Fire he subdued, and forced the desert earth
To bring forth fruit, and trees to give him shelter
From raging storms and from the weather's spite
He placed submission's yoke on beast and fowl,
Made deserts bloom, drew out the precious ore
From the earth's dark bowels, constructed noble ships
And ploughed the rolling seas from shore to shore,
Crossed sands and snows and desert plains of ice,
And with the iron ribbons of his roads
Begirt the very globe as with a net.
The mighty elements he conquered too
And like a light-winged bird swept through
The very depths of heaven in dashing flight.
And like a fish he plunged with utmost daring
Into the ocean's dark mysterious depths.
With mighty hand he harnessed even lightning,
Commanding it to bear his words and thoughts
About the world, and furnish heat and light.
A thirst for knowledge nought could satisfy,
Upborne upon the spirit's wings he flew
About the endless space of the universe,
Measured the suns, counted up the stars,*

*Divined perpetual motion's hidden laws
 And in a drop of water, too, espied
 The fateful secret of the birth of life.
 Filled with a holy discontent, for ever
 Seeking rebelliously for what is new,
 He boldly rent the shackles of the past
 And with a ruthless hand cast down and smashed
 His gods of yesterday. He made and overthrew
 And yet again he made the gods anew!
 And in this age-long fight with the Unknown
 He steeled his spirit, and like a fearless eagle,
 With keen, unblinking gaze and steadfast will,
 He learnt to look the great Unknown in the eyes!
 I believe: that there can be no end or limit
 To all the mightiness and power of man!
 There are no barriers to his kingly will!
 And could you ever think this world of ours
 Would always be a mournful vale of tears,
 And that the sun would never rise above it?
 What! Cannot man, who in the rapid flight
 Of some few thousand years has shown his power,
 Subduing to his mighty will earth, water, air,
 And fire and even the sea's mysterious depths,
 And shown his power to shake the thrones of heaven,
 To smash the spirit's fetters, to perform
 A host of wonders and to penetrate
 The secret of the world, what! cannot he
 Drive out of life with stern and mighty hand
 All need and sorrow, the hovels of the poor,
 Hard labour, tears, and all earth's maledictions?
 And can he not transform this vale of darkness,
 So full of woe, into a shining realm
 Of light, of freedom, happiness and beauty?*

*He can! I believe in man! Yes, I believe
 In his all-powerful Mind! He can do all!
 He'll conquer!*

When I now try to analyse whence all this came to me—the boundless faith in human reason, the idea of altering geography and changing climates, the firm conviction of the possibility of realizing the kingdom of joy and happiness on our planet, and much else—one thing becomes quite clear to me: all this springs from the half-childish enthusiasm for science, and especially for astronomy, which gave so much colour to my childhood and early youth.

CHAPTER TWELVE

*In Search of the Lights of Life: Turning to
Social and Political Interests*

THE SUMMER OF 1898 lives in my memory with a peculiar fragrance of warmth and intimacy. At the same time it was an important and significant summer in my life. It was devoid of great events or vivid impressions, such as I experienced in the years when I made the trips to Verny or on the convict barge. On the surface all was quiet, calm, almost monotonous. But on the other hand an unceasing, intensive work was going on in my mind. New ideas arose and new sentiments were awakened. New ways of development were indicated. The lights of life gradually rose above my mental horizon. . . .

That summer I made my first long journey alone. Back in the winter, Birdie had been insistently urging me to spend the holidays in Moscow. I, too, wanted very much to see her. It was decided that at the end of the school term I should go to my relations, and that I should go by myself! This idea filled me with excitement, almost delight, long in advance. And at last, one bright sunny morning, loaded with all sorts of things for the journey, when I jumped into a bright-green third-class carriage, the engine whistled and the white walls of the station glided past me with ever-increasing speed, I suddenly felt myself 'grown-up'. My mother hastily tripped along the platform with all our numerous family. She waved her hand affectionately and called out to me at the open window of the carriage: "Take care, Vanichka! Don't fall under the train! . . ." And then she added: "There are some pasties in the big packet, and tea and sugar in the little one."

But my thoughts were of anything but pasties and sugar.

In those days the journey from Omsk to Moscow took six days and nights. You had to change at Chelyabinsk and wait twelve hours for the train to Samara. I took advantage of the break in the journey, and having drunk a 'portion of tea' in the station refreshment-room and eaten the provisions I had brought from Omsk, I went for a stroll in the outskirts. Chelyabinsk was then some versts from the station. Apparently the people of Chelyabinsk, like those of Omsk, had failed to give a fat bribe to the constructors of the railway at the proper time and had been made to pay for this neglect by being obliged to drive to the station by a long, incredibly dusty road. Chelyabinsk itself at the end of the last century was a wretched place, with little houses with tiny windows, a couple of churches, two or three streets full of pot-holes, a dirty market-place and a shabby prison building at the entrance to the town. Exactly eight years later I spent two nightmarish days in that prison, when, after the year 1905, I was on my way to exile in Siberia. But this still lay hidden behind the mists of the future.

From Chelyabinsk our half-empty train began to fill up gradually. Three passengers got into my compartment: a young official of the

Excise department with his wife, and a fat, elderly priest, who was going to Moscow on a mission. He was a real, fat priest in a dark grey cassock and a round hat with upturned brim, and with a big, bushy beard and an enormous wart under his nose. He spoke in a deep bass voice. He got out of the train at every station and always came back either with a plump chicken, a sheep's trotter, or a jug of warm milk. He immediately adopted a paternal, patronizing tone towards me and invariably said "Well, young man, what about it? Shall we have something to eat?"

This, however, by no means signified that Father Feofil, as he was called, was inviting me to share his meal with him. Nothing of the sort. Father Feofil pulled a napkin out of his travelling-case and spread out on it an appetizing array of meat, bread, cucumbers and other eatables. Then he took out a folding pocket-knife and began his solitary feast. He ate greedily, munching and belching loudly, his lips all smeared with the fat. It was a repulsive spectacle. When at last all his victuals were 'liquidated', he wiped his mouth with the napkin, and turning to me again, said: "Well, and now, young man, what about having some tea, eh? . . . The ancient philosophers said truly. a sound mind in a sound body. . . . That's right!"

In order to have as little to do as possible with my fellow-traveller in the cassock, I used to spend most of the time on the platform of the carriage. I liked to stand there for hours, to look out of the window, to watch the ever-changing panorama of mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, and to think. . . . Not to think of any one thing, clearly and definitely, but to think in general, to think of many things at once, to think as though drifting down a broad stream of thought, without rudder and without sails, abandoned to the whim of the current. This brought me a profound peace, a kind of quiet joy that filled my whole being.

Once when I returned from the platform to the compartment, I found a heated argument going on. Father Feofil, larding his talk with ecclesiastical sayings, was ferociously running down Leo Tolstoy. He was particularly indignant at the great writer's views on marriage. The Excise official made a feeble attempt to oppose the priest, and the passengers from the neighbouring compartments, who had come to join in the argument, muttered something under their breath, gasped and heaved eloquent sighs. I felt as though a devil were roused in me. I loved Tolstoy, but even more did I hate Father Feofil. Interrupting the long-winded priest, I declared with an air of authority: "You don't understand anything at all about the question!"

"What do you mean, I don't understand?" roared the priest.

"What I said. You don't understand!" I answered impudently. "You keep on talking about the grace of God and all the rest of it. But in my opinion, a non-legalized union is far more moral than lawful marriage."

"What?" shouted Father Feofil, going red as a lobster. "How dare you? Whipper-snapper!"

So terrible was his indignation that he completely forgot himself and spoke to me in the second person singular.

"In the first place," I parried, "I must ask you not to address me as 'thou'. And in the second place, I'm right. Surely you know what repulsive things are covered by lawful marriage? Isn't a bride often forced into marriage? Don't men marry for money?"

The argument began to develop into a row. It is the sort of thing the public always loves. In a moment passengers came running up from all parts of the carriage and crowded round our compartment and began to join in, taking sides—some sticking up for me and some for the priest.

I continued: "If two people come together in an unlegalised union and are prepared to put up with black looks, gossip, slander, and backbiting, it means they really love one another. It means that that kind of marriage is good. But marriage without love is immoral."

Father Feofil was so taken aback by my impudence that he couldn't find breath to speak. He went red and blue in the face and muttered something through his teeth about "nourishing a viper in the bosom". A hubbub broke out among the passengers who had collected, and a lot of ironical glances were directed at the priest. The mood of 'the masses' had evidently turned in my favour. At last, Father Feofil could stand it no longer; he jerked his portly body up from the seat, banged the door behind him and went out on to the platform of the carriage. Gradually everybody calmed down and went back to their places.

After this incident 'diplomatic relations' between Father Feofil and me were broken off, and we parted in Moscow without even saying good-bye.

The Tchemodanov family were spending the summer in the village of Kirillovka, about forty versts from Moscow, in typical Central Russian countryside, quiet and beautiful: forests, fields, meadows, a narrow winding stream and plenty of berries, mushrooms and flowers. The family had rented a simple wooden villa with a veranda. Aunt Lily did the housekeeping, and Aunt Julia philosophized and argued about life in general. We drank milk in the mornings, dined at midday and went for frequent walks in the forest or sprawled about in the neighbouring meadow. The children ran about, romped, played, grazed their knees and cut their fingers. On Sundays, Uncle Misha, heavily loaded with all sorts of parcels and bundles, would arrive from the city. In short, everything was practically the same as at Maxilovo, only we children were four years older, and this fact gave new colour to our lives.

On one of his visits, Uncle Misha brought us a croquet set. We began to play in the open meadow behind the villa. Soon the craze for croquet became an epidemic. Everybody played—except the Aunts, of course—and played with a vengeance. They began immediately after breakfast and went on till late in the evening. At tea or dinner they talked of nothing but croquet matches, the 'mouse-trap', 'croqueting' and 'pirates'. Their enthusiasm developed into a kind of mania. When Uncle Misha came the excitement was even more intense. He was an excellent croquet player—he had a good eye and a powerful wrist. If he became a 'pirate', the opposing side could regard itself

as defeated. He always put a lot of passion and energy into the game, as in everything he did. On Sunday the day wasn't long enough for us. Uncle Misha would bring candles out to the field, and quite often we finished playing the match by their flickering light in the darkness. The Aunts laughed and poked fun at us, but it made no difference. They were particularly fond of attacking Uncle Misha.

"Come on, you old fool. Have you gone off your head?" Aunt Lily would often say to him in a good-natured, grumbling way.

Uncle Misha would make a gallant gesture with his hand and answer mischievously: "According to the Romans, I'm still a youth! Among the Romans a man of forty was regarded as a youth."

After a while I got tired of croquet, but Birdie's brothers, Mishuk and Gunka, remained faithful to the game right up to the end of the summer holidays.

But the principal charm of the summer at Kirillovka lay in something else. It lay in my relations with Birdie. We were both of the same age and had grown up and developed together since early childhood. True, we lived in different places—Birdie in Moscow, and I in Omsk—but we spent two or three months together every summer, and during the rest of the year we carried on a voluminous correspondence, in which we exchanged ideas and sentiments about everything that interested us: events at school, books we had read, friends and acquaintances, domestic squabbles, theatrical performances, our personal moods, our plans for the future, and many other things. The whole of our daily life was reflected in this correspondence. In it we discussed various questions, disputed, argued and came to agreement. Sometimes we quarrelled, but we made it up in the end. As a result our minds developed along lines which were not only parallel, but which interlocked and ran together. We couldn't help influencing and at the same time stimulating each other. This friendship with Birdie, which continued right up to the end of my schooldays, was the focus of my inner life in the years of my childhood and early youth and constitutes one of the best pages in the book of my past.

Later on, our ways parted somewhat: I took the path of revolution, and Birdie followed the path of the progressive, radical cultural movement. She finished the University course for women in Moscow and worked first of all in the Sunday school for workers, and then in the Prechistensky courses for workmen, giving lectures and writing articles and pamphlets. Life did not pamper her very much. Early marriage, domestic misfortunes and the necessity of supporting and bringing up her children herself, laid their mark upon her temperament. Nevertheless, this elegant, tiny woman with pitch-black hair turned out to be made of strong metal. She cheerfully stood up to the blows of capricious fate, worked indefatigably, and systematically extended her mental horizon and education. In Soviet times Birdie threw herself into the work of the Factory Schools, and after they were closed she lectured and did literary work. She never belonged to any Party. Nevertheless, she gave her whole life to the service of the working masses and contributed her share to the cause of their cultural progress and improvement.

The parting of the ways had its effect on our mutual relations. The

former friendly harmony between us disappeared. Certain rifts and dissonances made their appearance. Moreover, the revolutionary struggle shifted me from one place to another and made it very difficult for us to maintain systematic relations. For years I never saw Birdie. Our correspondence alternately flared up and died down. Life and work in various conditions, in different circumstances and different countries (I spent many years abroad, first as an émigré, and later on, in Soviet times, as a diplomat) naturally brought about a mutual estrangement. Nevertheless, I always retained and still retain a warm feeling towards the closest spiritual companion of my early life—the most important period in the life of every man, when the foundations of his mind, character, and spirit are laid.

But I have run on a long way ahead. At the time of that memorable summer at Kirillovka, Birdie was in her fifteenth year. She was in that transitional stage of half-girl half-woman, when all thoughts and emotions are so full of marked hesitations and contradictions. She rises up in my memory as though alive: slim and tiny, slightly angular, with a swarthy complexion and a mass of deep black hair like a raven's wing. Her brown eyes laugh and tease. Her bright cotton dress fits neatly to her figure, which is beginning to take on a womanly shape. The fragrance of spring and the charm of awakening youth emanate from her whole being.

We used to spend most of our time together. We went for walks, gathered berries and mushrooms, played croquet, read and had heart-to-heart talks. I loved to hear Birdie playing the piano at dusk or in the evening. Unlike me she practised systematically and by this time had already become a good pianist. She would sit down at the keyboard and I would find a place for myself somewhere nearby, in a wooden rocking-chair or on the frayed and faded divan. Birdie would play and I would listen and think. What about? I was not always able to keep control over my own thoughts. Music evokes in me a peculiar sensation, as though I were floating gently and smoothly over a broad sea of song, moving effortlessly along. The waves of sound roll on, now flowing towards me, now away from me; and as I float upon them they call up in my mind thought-sounds and thought-images which are not subject to my will but live a life of their own. I often used to experience these sensations in the evenings when Birdie sat down at the piano. She played Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Rubinstein, Mendelssohn and many other composers. When she came to the end of a piece, I would stop her and say: "Now let's get to the bottom of it. What did the composer want to say?"

And we would set about trying to explain it. Our imagination drew one picture after another. Often we disagreed in our interpretation. What was to me the whining of the autumn wind, sounded to Birdie like the doleful song of a drunken reveller. Where I heard the sound of bells, Birdie would hear the music of a fair. Sometimes we argued till our voices were hoarse, and rummaged in the biographies of composers in search of evidence. That summer Beethoven did not captivate me, my fondness for him came later. But Bach made a great impression on me. His Fugues seemed to me the height of musical genius.

When Birdie played his first Fugue, I saw before me the lofty arches of a severe Gothic church and the little organist carried up on the wings of sound from his instrument into the boundless spaces of the universe I liked Mendelssohn even more His "Songs without Words" filled me with perfect delight. The "Spring Song" and the "Funeral March" stirred me—each in its own way—to the depths of my soul I could listen to them for ever.

Most of the time, however, we spent in conversation. Both of us had kept a diary during the winter. Now Birdie read mine and I read hers, and page after page provoked a mutual exchange of opinions, arguments, discussions, and an influx of new ideas. We were also very fond of 'reviewing' the books we had read. We read a tremendous amount in those years—both Russian and foreign writers. Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgeniev, Dostoyevsky, Nekrasov, Leo Tolstoy, Korolenko, Melshin, Dickens, Voynich, Schiller, Orzeszko, Shakespeare, Goethe, Hugo, and other great masters of literature were our constant spiritual companions. And although in our letters we habitually shared our impressions of the books we had read, it was particularly interesting and pleasant, in the summer and at leisure, to talk in more detail about this or that work which had made a particularly strong impression. I remember we were talking one day about Turgeniev in general and about *Fathers and Sons* in particular.

"I like Bazarov immensely," I said enthusiastically. "He's my ideal. I want to be like Bazarov . . . You know, Birdie, last winter I tried to imitate him and tell everybody the truth to their face."

"Even the teachers?" Birdie hastened to inquire, interrupting me.

Her question was rather embarrassing to me, as I had not taken the risk of applying 'Bazarov's methods' in my relations with the pedagogues of the high school.

"The teachers?" I repeated in my embarrassment. "No, what sort of conversation can one have with teachers? But with companions I was always quite frank. I said what I thought. . . . Anyway, I'd never sneak on a schoolfellow. That's my rule."

Birdie noticed my embarrassment and, looking at me slyly, replied "So you see, your Bazarov isn't any good sometimes . . . And besides, he's so abrupt and rude. Sometimes he merely irritates me. I like Insarov in *On the Eve*. He is less pretentious and more sincere."

We started a long dispute. Birdie had a keen mind and the capacity to find arguments. In the end we both of us stuck to our own opinion, but I must admit that after this conversation my attitude towards Bazarov underwent a slight change. Turgeniev's hero still appealed to me very much as before, but his image seemed to have got rather tarnished in my imagination, and I gave up imitating him too closely.

Another time I asked Birdie whether she had read H. G. Wells's fantasy, *The War of the Worlds*. She said she had not. Then with great enthusiasm and in much detail I told her the story of that famous book, which had made a great impression on me on account of my astronomical studies. Birdie also began to take an interest in Wells's fantasies. Sitting on the bank of the quiet little river near Moscow, we discussed for a long time the question of the possibility of inter-planetary communica-

tion. I told Birdie all I knew about Mars and its 'canals', which had been described by the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli twenty years previously. These canals are now discredited and regarded almost as the product of their 'discoverer's' too vivid imagination. But in those days serious scientists believed in them, regarding the presence of canals as proof of the existence on Mars of higher forms of life similar to those existing on the earth. It was presumed by many that the Martians must have a much higher level of culture than terrestrial man. Having finished my exposition, I added that my greatest desire in the world was to pay a visit to Mars.

"Yes, but what if you were killed in the attempt?" said Birdie rather thoughtfully.

"I'm ready to take the risk!" I said warmly. "I'd give my life to make a flight like that."

Birdie seemed interested and kept on asking me all about the technical possibilities of such a bold enterprise. I expounded to her all the scientific-fantastic stuff I had previously got from Jules Verne and Wells. Birdie listened with great attention, and I had the impression that she was giving me her blessing for the daring attempt. Suddenly a shadow seemed to pass over her face. She turned abruptly towards me and snapped out unexpectedly in a voice in which there was a hint of secret irritation. "Aunt is right, anyway. You're a terrible egotist, Vanichka".

"Egotist?" I said in amazement.

"Of course!" Birdie answered heatedly. "Just think. They all love you here. They look after you, educate you and try to satisfy your every wish. And what do you do? You're ready to snap your fingers at them for the sake of the pleasure of flying to this damned Mars and breaking your head for goodness knows what. But have you given a thought to your parents and all of us?"

I began to protest energetically and appealed to the thick volume on *The Martyrs of Science*, which Birdie and I had read together a few years before. But Birdie refused to listen.

"No; you're simply a crusty, heartless creature. . . . Instead of a heart you've got an electric gadget!"

I was miserable. My mother had long been accusing me of being cold and hard-hearted. The Aunts never lost an occasion to assert that I had 'no heart'. And now Birdie, my best friend, was talking about an 'electric gadget'. . . . Could I really be so bad? I felt a deep protest rise up within me, but I was quite sure I was right. I thought a little and said: "You see, Birdie, I've got an idea I belong to that breed of people in whom reason predominates over the heart. I'm a man whose passions are not of the heart, but of the head."

These casual words of a fourteen-year-old boy turned out to be prophetic. All the experience of my subsequent life has proved them to be right.

In my memory yet another incident stands out. Sitting on a bench not far from our house, Birdie and I were 'reviewing' Goethe's *Faust*. We both liked this great work, although at the time, of course, we did not understand all its profundity. This was shown by the fact that it was not Faust or Mephistopheles in whom we were interested, but

Gretchen. We discussed her touchingly naïve, gentle character with sympathy, and I declared sententiously: "No; Gretchen is not the heroine of my romance!"

Birdie protested and went into a long argument about philosophy, morality and the eternal feminine. At that period she was convinced for some reason or other that a woman's 'full life' ended at the age of eighteen! Hence there was no reason to be sorry for Gretchen's untimely end. Birdie became almost melancholy and spoke in a low, sad tone of voice, so that I could not help falling into her mood.

Then she raised her eyes from the ground, at which she had been staring all the time she was 'thinking aloud', turned round in a kind of elegant, cat-like way and raised her head. It was a bright summer day. Shining white clouds were floating slowly across the deep blue sky. The rays of the sun bathed the little village, the meadows and the darkling wood in the distance. Suddenly Birdie jumped up from her place, and quite transformed, exclaimed. "How do you like my new dress?"

She twirled round and round where she stood so that her blue sateen frock billowed in the breeze. I praised the dress, which was really charming, and realized that it gave Birdie great pleasure. Then she shook her thick black hair, took hold of my hand and dragged me to the river, crying out: "Let's go along the bank. I saw such wonderful flowers there yesterday. I'll make a flower-chain while you recite poetry to me."

I made no resistance.

And in this dark, charming girl, with all her seriousness and reading, there was undoubtedly that 'eternal feminine' which the poets have so much adored.

However, the most important event of that summer—an event which played a great part in my spiritual development at this time—took place just before the end of my stay at Kirillovka. One day Aunt Lily, who usually interfered very little in the affairs of Birdie and myself, advised us to read a novel called *No Man Fights Alone*, by the German writer Spielhagen. She had read the novel herself in her young days and had liked it very much. The next time Uncle Misha came from the city he brought us the book, a thick volume of six hundred pages, and Birdie and I set about reading it. Sometimes we read aloud, but most of the time we read the book separately in turns, catching up with and overtaking each other. We began without any great enthusiasm and even with a certain indifference, being rather put off by the length of the book and the long-winded style of the narrative. We were also repelled by the pedantic and stilted tone of the principal characters' conversation. But as we read on, our attitude changed. Half-way through the novel we found ourselves intensely interested in the story, and when we had finished it, we could think of nothing but the drama portrayed in its pages. After reading the last line we sat for a long while without speaking. At last Birdie said: "We must think it all over. . . . My head's simply reeling."

Spielhagen's novel presented a wide and colourful canvas. The story opens before the German revolution of 1848, on the feudal estates of Baron Tuchheim—a flabby, liberalizing landowner, who in the depth

of his soul, however, is steeped with the traditions and prejudices of his class. In his house, being brought up together with Henry, the Baron's son, live Walter, the son of Tuchheim's forester, and his cousin Leo, the son of a poor peasant who had died young, worn out with working for Tuchheim. Walter, a gentle, kind-hearted, romantic youth, gets along very well in the baronial surroundings, falls in love and in the end marries Tuchheim's daughter Amelia. Leo is a complete contrast to him. Gloomy, reserved, embittered by the everlasting poverty and squabbles in his father's house, he hates the Baron and despises Walter and his family. He feels a certain amount of respect only for Sylvia, Walter's sister, a proud, strong girl, but most of the time he contends and quarrels even with her. Dissatisfied with his situation and life, he tries to find an escape in religious enthusiasm, but soon gets disillusioned with God. This is greatly facilitated by his association with Parson Urbans, who regards religion only as a 'bridle for the people' and a good means for promoting one's own personal advancement. Leo then falls under the influence of Tuski, the local teacher of natural history, a revolutionary democrat, who has set himself the task of overthrowing the power of feudalism. The revolution of 1848 breaks out. Tuchheim's peasants revolt. Tuski becomes their leader and Leo helps him. The uprising ends in failure, and Tuski together with the seventeen-year-old Leo take refuge abroad.

Many years go by. Prussia enters an era of rotten compromise between feudalism and the *bourgeoisie* which was just beginning to raise its head. The feudal barons, with the king at their head, rule the country, while the *bourgeoisie*, in the person of the 'Party of Progressives', plays at opposition within the walls of the impotent and weak-willed Prussian *Landtag*. The figure of Bismarck begins to loom on the horizon. In keeping with the ideas of the new age, Baron Tuchheim no longer lives on his estate. He has settled in Berlin and comes in contact with the Jewish banker von Sonnenstein, who is now setting up factories and workshops on Tuchheim's estates. Tuchheim's starving peasants are turned into starving workers, for Sonnenstein knows how to get surplus value out of them. Walter is also living in Berlin. He has become a Liberal teacher and writer, and even gets thrown into prison on account of one of his novels. Leo appears again on the scene unexpectedly, but he is altogether different from the man who once fled from Tuchheim. The years he spent abroad have not failed to leave their mark on him. He is now a doctor, an informed politician, a brilliant orator and a man of the world with fine manners and the ability to charm people. Tuski's primitive revolutionary democratism no longer satisfies him. He is still devoted to the cause of the people, but he wants to go towards his goal by another way. He has unbounded faith in his own powers and is ready to make great sacrifices for the cause, giving up peace, comfort, success, love, even life itself. On one occasion Leo says: "You, peaceful virtuous people, weave for yourselves warm nests on safe rocks beside the ocean, and leave me the ocean, which unfortunately is not boundless."

Leo meets Sylvia again. This time they fall deeply in love. Sylvia believes in Leo and backs him up in every way. Leo's plan consists

at first in convincing the 'progressive' *bourgeoisie* of the necessity of relying on the workers in the struggle against feudalism, but he meets with no success. Then he abruptly changes front and tries to convince the king of the importance of bringing the workers in on his side for the struggle with the *bourgeois* opposition. Taking advantage of Sylvia's beauty, Leo succeeds through her aunt Sarra, who is at the Court, in getting an audience with the king and expounds his ideas to him. The king plays up to Leo, gives him the money with which to buy up the Tuchheim factories from Sonnenstein, and presents him with a luxurious villa, but refuses to appoint a new government prepared to carry out social reforms. Leo creates an association of workers to run the Tuchheim factories, but the business does not succeed. The association is not in the position to compete with capitalist concerns and is on the verge of bankruptcy. Leo tries to save the association by mortgaging to a money-lender the villa given him by the king. Sacrificing his love for Sylvia, he thinks of marrying a General's daughter in order to strengthen his ties with Court circles and increase his influence with the king. But everything suddenly begins to crumble. The workers' association is definitely ruined, in despair its members set fire to the factory, the king dies, Sylvia drowns herself, and Leo, disheartened and disillusioned, ends his life in a duel obligingly arranged by the author.

There can be no doubt that this novel by Spielhagen, who himself was a Prussian progressive, is a Liberal-Philistine attempt to caricature Lassalle. It was published in Germany shortly after the latter's death, towards the end of the 'sixties. And when, as a conscious Marxist, I re-read *No Man Fights Alone* ten years after reading it at Kirillovka, I was struck by the petty *bourgeois* spirit with which it was permeated. I found it boring and tedious to read through the long discourses of its heroes and the sentimental descriptions of their sufferings, which were unintelligible to me.

But during that memorable summer at Kirillovka everything was quite different. Birdie had good reason to say that 'her head was reeling'. The influx of new images, thoughts and impressions resulting from our reading of Spielhagen's novel was so great that it was some days before we came to ourselves. It was as though a curtain had been raised before our eyes and we found ourselves gazing at some far-off, wide horizon—still vague and misty, but infinitely alluring and interesting. It was the first time I had read of scenes of revolution, the first time I had seen the workings of Western European politics—even though in a poor Prussian version—the first time I had realized the existence of parties, parliament, ministries, and the first time I had heard about the workers' movement and workers' associations. The negative features of the story—its 'progressivist' spirit and its complete distortion of Lassalle's teaching—had escaped me at the time. On the other hand, the broad canvas of European life—so fresh, free and conscious in comparison with the conditions of Tsarist Russia—fascinated me and aroused new thoughts and feelings in my consciousness. Leo became my hero. I began to talk in his style and to use his aphorisms. I chose his name for my literary pseudonym. I now often began my letters to Birdie with the words 'My dear Sylvia', and ended them with the signature 'Thy Leo'.



'BIRDIE', AGED SIXTEEN

I tried to imitate my ideal in my behaviour, appearance and manners. Having read *War and Peace*, I informed Birdie that the novel had made a very strong impression on me, and that, if you please, I was quite ready to acknowledge Leo Tolstoy had talent, something like Spielhagen, but not, of course, on the same level! This enthusiasm for a now completely forgotten German writer remained with me for two years, and it was only when I was in the top form at the high school that it gave place to a more mature and conscious political frame of mind.

Be that as it may, Spielhagen's novel is one of the most important landmarks in the history of my early spiritual development. Until then, in my search for the lights of life, I had followed the paths of science. Now they took a sharp turn in the direction of public affairs. This turn did not take place all at once and passed through a number of stages, but in the long run it led me to the road which was to become the high road of my life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The High School

ON RETURNING TO Omsk, I began to regard the life around me in a different light. Not that any sudden, abrupt change had taken place in me, no, there was nothing of that. The main lines of my spiritual development remained the same as before, but the summer at Kirillovka, and especially Spielhagen's novel, had left their mark on me. I had taken a few steps forward along the path by which I was going, and many things now began to appear to me in a different light. The principal change consisted in the fact that a critical feeling towards the existing order was aroused in me. And this gave rise to my subsequent protest against that order and to my participation in the revolutionary struggle for its abolition.

However, in the autumn of 1898 the first manifestation of my new attitude was rather colourful and chaotic. I had always been a great reader, but now I began to devour stacks of books and periodicals. Nobody guided my reading, and in a state of permanent mental excitement I hurriedly and stubbornly imbibed the greatest possible variety of ideas, sentiments, images, information and facts, from all spheres of human life. The origin of the universe, the problems of morality, the questions of the social struggle, the planetary system, the molecular structure of matter, the Socratic philosophy, the quest of Faust, Pasteur's discoveries, Mahomedanism, the symphonies of Beethoven—all this and much else went whirling round in my head. The sensation I had all this time was as though I were present at a table groaning under the weight of rich and exquisite foods and was told "Go on, eat your fill!" I was very hungry, and greedily attacked the food. I devoured every-

thing that came to hand, without knife or fork, in savage disorder, stuffing my mouth, with only one thought in my head: 'Fill yourself up as quickly as you can! You will digest it somehow or other.'

Little by little, however, out of this chaos, there began to appear the outline of some vague order gradually taking form. My reading became more and more concentrated on such writers as Pisarev, Dobrolibov, Nekrasov, Shchedrin, Herzen, Heine, Schiller, Byron. And my thoughts tended more and more to the conclusion that intellectual cowardice was the greatest sin of man, that intellectual courage was the greatest virtue and that the best means for fighting against intellectual cowardice was the weapon of criticism, which for some reason I then called 'scepticism'.

But against what, in the first place, could I direct the spearhead of my criticism? Obviously the target had to be the chief constituents of my environment at the time, from which I suffered the most and which caused me more unpleasantness and vexation than anything else—in short, the high school. I was greatly assisted in this choice by a casual circumstance. I read a brilliant criticism of the conditions of higher education in Russia in the 'sixties of last century in an article entitled, 'Our University Science', by Pisarev, on whom I was very keen at the time. The article made a great impression on me. And the question immediately arose in my mind: 'But what about our high school science?'

And so the target was found. And there was any amount of ammunition to fire at it.

The high school! When I now pronounce that word, a whole gallery of long-forgotten pictures and images automatically rises up in my memory.

A yellow, two-storeyed stone building with a big icon over the entrance, long half-dark corridors that for some reason are cold even on the hottest summer day, grey-painted class-rooms with rows of dirty-yellow, knif-hacked, ink-besprattered desks. In each class-room there is the same kind of platform, 'battered by time and storms', and on either side of which are black-boards with sponges and chalk. At the end of the lower corridor is a large assembly hall, where we boys foregather from time to time on solemn occasions, and where we do gymnastics at other times. A wide playground with a few puny trees, where, on warm days, we noisily spend the 'long break'. Here we can run about, shout, play at touch-last, swing on the giant-stride or swarm up the ladder or rope. At the end of the yard there is a low wooden house, looking just as though it had been flattened. This is the 'Principal's' house. It is a special world, separated from the high school by a low, weather-beaten fence, from beyond which there often come delicious smells and the appetizing clatter of knives on plates. Sometimes one catches a glimpse of female silhouettes that excite the curiosity of the schoolboys. But we are not admitted there. From there we are only governed. . . .

It is dismal, uncomfortable, cold and unfriendly in this two-storeyed yellow building. It does not attract: it repels. Every superfluous moment spent here seems lost.

But it is not only a question of the building.

There was also our 'high school Olympus', as the boys ironically call the teaching staff. What men! What characters!

The 'Principal' of the school is a 'Russian Czech' named Mudrokh. I don't know what wind brought him from his native Czechia to Russia, but I do know that he dug himself in very firmly and took strong root in the bureaucratic machine of his new country. Tall, stout, with smoothly-parted grey hair, he seldom shows himself to the boys. He dislikes movement in general, and, moreover, considers that a stationary attitude serves the interests of 'subordination and discipline'. 'The people' must not see their 'ruler' too often and too closely—that would never do. Otherwise 'distance' will disappear, 'respect' will be lost and 'anarchy' will set in. Mudrokh sits in his study, signs papers, sends for the teachers to appear before him. He speaks in a dry, grating voice with a strong foreign accent, splutters and accompanies his words with measured gestures, as though keeping time. It seems as though he hammers ideas into his listener's head, as a hammer knocks in a nail. The teachers do not like him and take pleasure in relating all kinds of gossip and anecdotes about him. The schoolboys simply hate him—for his haughtiness, his heartless formalism and his deadly but very effective bureaucracy. . . .

The Supervisor of the high school is Soloviov. He is a complete contrast to the Principal in appearance and character. Small, round, exceedingly agile, he rolls like a ball the whole day long round the corridors, the class-rooms, the lavatories, giving the boys no peace. His bald pate shines in the distance, his steel spectacles are perched comically on his little nose, his locks of unkempt grey hair bristle amusingly on his temples. Soloviov is the terror of the school. He is everywhere and nowhere. He pops up suddenly wherever a group of scholars has collected, unexpectedly comes down on every boy who has broken a rule, and deals out judgment and punishment on the spot. One is continually hearing:

"Why have you got a button undone? . . . Stand like a post!"

"What have you been dirtying your hands with? Ink? . . . Stand like a post!"

"What's that you've got up your sleeve? Show me, show me! Don't be afraid! . . . A-ha! A cigarette! . . . Stand like a post!"

Soloviov makes a score or more boys 'stand like posts' and then runs off to the teachers' room for a quarter of an hour. But even there he can't stay still. He appears in the corridor and starts the same trick again. That is why the boys have nicknamed him 'Chish' (the Finch), and as soon as he appears at one end of the corridor, there flies down the whole length of it, just like a bandit's call in the forest, the warning word: 'Chi-i-sh! Chi-i-sh!"

Soloviov flies into a rage, rushes at the first boy he meets, seizes him by the scruff of the neck and, pushing him with his nose against the wall, shouts: "You called that! You called that! Stand like a post! Stand like a post! . . ."

The Latin master is Mikhnovsky. He is a tall, red-haired man with round gold spectacles, through which he likes to fix a pupil with a 'piercing eye'. He knows his subject and considers it to be 'the core' of the high school curriculum. 'Core' is the actual word he uses. All his

teaching is based on a system of ruthless swotting. He refuses to recognize any other method. We read Cæsar, Virgil, and Horace with him, but we haven't the slightest idea of these writers, neither of their times, nor of the conditions of their work and development. We merely know separate lines and verses. For to-day we have been told to learn fifteen lines of Cæsar's *De Bello Gallico*, for to-morrow we have to learn twelve verses from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for the day after to-morrow we must learn one of the *Odes* of Horace, and so on. We learn, but do not understand why Cæsar was so interested in the war with the Gauls or why Ovid wrote about metamorphoses. However, if the pupil recites and translates a passage glibly, Mikhnovsky is satisfied. If not . . . then he thunders "That's no earthly good!"

Whereupon, in the form register against the corresponding name in his fine hand-writing, he enters with slow enjoyment the mark 'Two'. But this is only half the trouble, the worst only begins after Mikhnovsky has raised his eyes to the dirty ceiling and, putting on a sanctimonious look, proceeds to make scathing remarks about his victim. He jibes at the pupil in a long tiresome tirade, baring his black, decayed teeth at the class from time to time. It is just as though those teeth were chewing an endless, dreary rubber band. "He's a frightful bore," say the pupils, spitting with irritation.

In the evening Mikhnovsky wanders like a shadow about the Liubinsky Prospect, catching high school boys who are out-of-doors after eight o'clock and entering their names in a note-book. . . .

The Russian master is Voronin. He is a gloomy, self-centred man with a chestnut-coloured goatee and a bright-red nose that betrays his fondness for alcohol. It is said that when he came to Omsk some ten years ago he was full of liberal aspirations and good intentions. Life, however, soon showed him its thorns. The authorities persecuted him, his family increased rapidly, the situation became hopeless. He was unable to 'adapt himself' to his environment and simply 'went to pieces'. His breakdown took the form that was all too frequent in those days—drink. Voronin is an excellent teacher. He knows his subject well; he can explain the most difficult rule in an intelligible way; he is perfectly fair and has no 'favourites' and no 'step-sons'. But he drinks like the devil. Sometimes he comes into the class-room with a puffed, red face, feverish eyes and a smell of spirits coming from his mouth. Sometimes he disappears completely for two or three days. Then everybody knows that he is dead drunk. Afterwards he comes to the school looking pale, and is exceedingly bad-tempered. At such times every one of the pupils trembles with fear lest he should come under the master's terrible wrath. But in general the pupils are on good terms with Voronin—they respect him for his knowledge of his job and for his fairness. Moreover, they vaguely realize the inner tragedy of the man and sympathize with him. . . .

The history master, Bortkevich, has a rotund figure and is something of a sybarite. He is a great talker and wit. When he sits down at his desk and puts his pince-nez on his flat nose with a playfully nonchalant gesture, the whole class becomes hushed in expectation of something 'interesting'. And Bortkevich seldom disappoints these

expectations. To-day's lesson is about Alexander of Macedon (of course, according to the profound interpretation of the famous Ilovaisky), but this doesn't matter to Bortkevich in the least. He goes up to the black-board, rapidly draws two figures with the chalk—an acute angle and a semi-circle. Then, putting on a cunning look and screwing-up the narrow slits of his eyes almost to his ears, he turns to an over-grown boy sitting at the second desk and asks. "Kisseliov, which do you think is more beautiful—the angle or the semi-circle?"

Kisseliov looks perplexedly at Bortkevich, then at the class, and then again at Bortkevich, and in the end replies hesitatingly: "Well, let's say the semi-circle, although . . ."

"That's right!" Bortkevich interrupts him, delighted "The semi-circle of course! And why?"

Kisseliov is completely at a loss to know what to say to this. Bortkevich goes back to his desk and triumphantly announces: "Because the human eye takes in roundness more easily than angles . . . That's why the female figure is considered more beautiful than the male."

The class breaks into a loud roar in response to this last remark.

Bortkevich has justified his pupils' expectations.

Then we begin the lesson. Bortkevich comments and asks questions on the events of the past. But if you listen to him for several months, you are bound to come to the conclusion that all history is in reality merely the history of kings and spicy stories. It is not quite clear whether Bortkevich likes the kings, but on the other hand he certainly knows his stuff where spicy stories are concerned. And how he knows them! He knows them by the hundred, and always tells them with relish, gurgling with pleasure and enthusiasm.

And, indeed, this is not surprising. Bortkevich has the reputation of being the principal Don Juan of the town. The most incredible stories are told about his amorous adventures. People talk about them and, shaking their heads, add with a puzzled look: "But how does he manage it, the rascal? I could understand if he were good-looking, but good heavens! he's nothing to look at. he has neither looks nor presence. . . "

Petrov, the literature master, is a young man with fair hair, smartly twirled moustaches and brazen blue eyes. His appearance is such that one cannot help saying: "He's young but smart." He is capable, knows Russian literature quite well, and is a good judge of it. But first and foremost he is a careerist. He knows how to truckle to the authorities and please them by his anti-Semitism. But he is anxious not to fall out with the boys and in front of them parades his Liberal demagogery. At times he doesn't mind romping about with the boys in his shirt sleeves, especially if he has been drinking, but he is even more inclined to report them to the Principal for 'seditious free-thinking'. People say: "Petrov will go a long way." This is precisely why the boys, in spite of all his efforts, have no confidence in him. They give him his due for his intelligence and knowledge, but their general opinion is: "He's as slippery as an eel—he'd give you away for less than a farthing."

French is taught by Galen, a handsome, dark-haired man of about fifty. His black hair is streaked with grey. He is said to have been a hairdresser at one time, and, indeed, he exudes even now an odour of

hair-oil and scented soap. He bothers very little about teaching, and most of the time pulls terrible faces and talks about the performances in the Paris theatres. Nobody in his class does anything or learns anything for that matter. From time to time Galen calls somebody out and questions him on the lesson. The result is usually lamentable. Then Galen gets angry and shouts volubly: "Very bad! Very bad! Go back to your place! You must polish up your knowledge."

Then he pulls another face and goes on to the next story about the French theatre. . . .

The German master, Berg, justifies his name—the German for 'mountain'. He is not a man, but an enormous mound of flesh, eighty-four inches in circumference. He weighs twenty-five stone, and at dinner eats five platefuls of soup and ten meat rissoles. He tells all and sundry that he 'graduated at Dorpat University' and is a 'specialist' in German literature. This may be so, but there is no evidence of it beyond the enormous weight of his body. Of course, he is a sick man, and he ought to look after his health. Instead of that, he teaches us the German language, or rather, snores quietly through the lessons. He comes into the class-room, sits down in his chair, which begins to crack under his mighty frame, calls out one or two pupils and suddenly . . . his head sinks comfortably on to his right arm on the desk, his eyes close, and from his enormous fleshy nose issue light suspicious noises. A few minutes go by. One of the pupils mischievously bangs the lid of a desk. . . . Berg starts up, opens his eyes and asks, as though nothing had happened. "Nikolayev, why have you lost your tongue?"

"But you didn't call me out," Nikolayev replies in astonishment.

"I didn't call you out?" Berg retorts, beginning to get angry. "What do you mean by inventing that story? Answer me, answer me!"

And when the astonished Nikolayev stands up to answer questions on to-day's lesson, Berg's head suddenly sinks comfortably on to his arm again, and his gentle snores begin to steal over the class-room.

The following incident happened in one of his classes. When Berg dozed off as usual, all the pupils, one after the other, walked quietly out of the room. 'Chish', who happened to drop in by chance, was astonished at the scene before him: an empty class-room and on the teacher's dais a loudly-snoring, gigantic mound of fat and flesh, known as Berg, teacher of the German language. . . .

I do not think it necessary to draw the portraits of the rest of this gallery of pedagogues. Those I have already given are sufficient.

Such was our Omsk high school 'Olympus', and of course it was not difficult for me to dissect all its ugly features when I approached it with the instrument of critical analysis. Two facts stood out with particular sharpness.

In the first place, the soulless, deadly formalism which permeated our educational system and characterized the relations between the teaching staff and the pupils. All the teaching was based on senseless swotting, and the entire education consisted in the methodical application of the principle "keep a tight hold and don't let go". The high school boy was bound hand and foot with dozens of stupid and irksome rules: he was obliged to go to church and to carry a satchel. He was not

allowed to go to a theatre or to be out-of-doors after eight o'clock in the evening, etc. The whole concern of the high school administration was to fit the young people into this narrow frame-work I have already said that Mikhnovsky, the Latin master, used to hunt for pupils who were out late. But he was not the only one. The Principal, Mudrokh, systematically sent the form masters and their assistants to look for 'unseemly conduct' (as he called it) on the part of the pupils and required them to bring back compromising information Whoever failed to bring back any information was reprimanded in the following manner:

"Fool! You get paid, you go out and don't see anything! Fool!"

Soloviov, the Supervisor, often used to hide near the entrance and jot down the names of the pupils who were not carrying their satchels across their shoulders. Yes, our masters were completely subservient, and dutifully carried out the task of the Tsarist régime—to stifle the mind and paralyse the will of the growing generation

In the second place, I was thoroughly disgusted at the shameless cringing, which had become second nature to the teaching staff. It followed a regular scale: the Supervisor fawned on the Principal, the master on the Supervisor, the class-tutor on the master, and so on They bowed down to the authorities, they cringed to them, they licked their boots. I remember one remarkable occasion. The Chief Inspector of Education for our district came from Tomsk to visit the high school. Two days before he arrived, all the class-rooms and corridors were washed, scrubbed and tidied up, lessons being stopped during the process. On the day before the visit, Mikhnovsky came into the class-room and spent the whole of his hour on 'preparing' the pupils for the 'happy event'. And didn't he shed his Olympian majesty! In front of all the boys he demonstrated what we were to do if the Inspector came into our class-room, how to come out from behind the desk, how to bow, how to smile, how to express delight at the wisdom of authority. Next day the Inspector missed our class-room as though on purpose, and Mikhnovsky was terribly disappointed On the other hand an amazing scene took place in the corridor of the school. When the Inspector appeared there, accompanied by Mudrokh, Chush ran like a little cockerel in front of them and, addressing the crowd of pupils, hissed in a half-whisper full of anger and irritation: "Bow! Bow! What are you standing there like blockheads for?"

At the same time the tall gymnastic instructor, mincing along behind the Inspector and the Principal and, gesticulating and rolling his eyes furiously, signalled to the school-boys from behind the backs of the 'Olympians': "Stand to attention! Bow!"

Watching this scene, I felt nauseated and disgusted.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Revolt in the High School

I SOON TOOK another step forward in my campaign of criticism against the high school. Imitating Pisarev, I set about writing a long article with the title "Our High School Science." I do not know why I started it. It was impossible to publish anything of the kind in those days owing to the censorship, and apart from that, I had as yet no connections or acquaintances in literary circles. Nevertheless I began to write simply because I wanted to and because my head was teeming with new ideas and questions which had to find a way out. Perhaps also my latent inclination towards literature was beginning to reveal itself. My article was written with great fervour, but it was naive, muddled and florid. It had one useful result; in the process of writing it I was obliged to arrange my ideas in some sort of order, sum up my observations and formulate my deductions and conclusions with greater precision.

This experiment was not without advantage for me. In later life, every time I have been obliged to discriminate and find my bearings in the sudden chaotic onrush of new ideas, sentiments, facts and considerations, I have had recourse to my pen. Often I have written for myself alone, but it has always served its purpose. This kind of work has greatly helped me to clear my mind and to find a firm ground in the varied and contradictory phenomena of reality.

When I finished my article on high school science, my conclusions were neatly formulated in a couple of slogans:

*Down with the Classics!
Up with Science!*

Of course, there was nothing original in my deductions. They were in the air at the time and thousands of people throughout the length and breadth of Russia were coming to the same conclusions. And they were even half-hinting at them in the newspapers and periodicals. But to me personally they were almost a revelation. I lost no time in sharing them with my more intimate class-mates. My ideas appealed to them very much: all of them hated Latin and Greek, at any rate in the form in which they were taught to us. And all felt there was a big gap in their education owing to the absence of the natural sciences in the curriculum of the boys' high schools; in the high schools for girls natural history was taught. The question I had raised was talked about and discussed in the class-room. Moreover, my point of view was ardently defended in particular by one fair-haired, blue-eyed boy with a funny little nose which he was constantly wiping with his finger. His name was Nikolai Olinger. We had been in the same class together for several years, but somehow we had not made friends. Now, in the process of digesting new ideas about the classics and natural science,

we drew closer together and became friends. This, as I shall describe later on, played a big part in my subsequent development.

It was not long before the ferment to which my 'heretical' ideas on high school science gave rise in the class came to the top and caused a big 'scandal' in the life of the school—the first scandal in the history of that turbulent winter of 1898–99.

One day Mikhnovsky, the Latin master, came into the class-room in a very bad mood. He called out five pupils one after the other, went on finding fault with them and worrying the life out of them with terrifying reprimands, and ended up by adorning the class register with five beautifully written 'Two's'. This immediately warmed up the atmosphere. The sixth boy to be called out was Gogoliev, the son of an army topographer, an intelligent, well-developed lad. Gogoliev recited the lesson not at all badly—as I now remember, it was a short passage from Horace—and in normal circumstances he would have been sure of a 'Four'. But Mikhnovsky went for him at once and shouted: "That's no earthly good!"

"Why is it no earthly good?" Gogoliev asked indignantly. "Horace is a very difficult writer, and I spent a long time learning the lesson yesterday."

"Hold your tongue!" roared Mikhnovsky. "I don't need your opinion of Horace."

The tension of the class became more and more strained. Poor Gogoiev went red and white by turns. Mikhnovsky's behaviour filled me with indignation to the depths of my being, and in answer to his last remark I said to the whole class in a loud, deliberate voice: "You live and learn!"

Mikhnovsky jumped up from his seat as though he had been stung, and shouted in a rage: "Stand up!"

Reluctantly I got up from my seat and then sat defiantly on the desk. I felt I had got the devil in me and knew that now I would stop at nothing. Mikhnovsky was so astonished at my daring that he was almost dumbfounded and could only mutter insanely: "This is . . . this is . . . this is . . ."

Gogoliev was forgotten. Events had taken a much more sensational turn.

"I've long been wanting to ask you, Alexander Ignatievich," I went on, "what are we learning ancient languages for? We spend ten or eleven hours a week on them, that is to say, more than a third of our whole school-time. And what for?"

I stopped and, looking the picture of innocence, waited for Mikhnovsky to reply, but he was not in the mood for that. On the other hand, a wave of excitement swept the class. From all parts came voices:

"Quite right; why do they stuff our heads with all this rubbish?"

"They stifle us with verbs and grammar!"

"We can't make head or tail of Virgil and Horace!"

"We're wasting our time on a lot of trash!"

Olier broke in sarcastically: "We've spent half a year on Xenophon's *Recollections of Socrates*, and all we remember is that Socrates ascribes

all that is just to the letter 'A', and all that is unjust to the letter 'B'. What use is that to anyone? Is the game worth the candle?"

Mikhnovsky was absolutely astounded by this unexpected revolt. He immediately lost all his self-confidence and gazed in bewilderment at the excited faces of his pupils. Then he seemed to soften and began to speak in a more human tone. He even condescended to enter into an argument with us.

"How can one deny the importance of ancient languages?" he said, waving his hands in perplexity. "What depth of thought there is in the ancient poets! What perfection of form! Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Eneid*—these are something beyond compare. . . . These are treasure-houses of beauty and poetry."

We objected furiously. Actually, none of us at the time knew anything about ancient literature, as at school we were not studying the writer's works, but only learning lines and parts of speech. To us the classics were the symbol of all the abominable, odious, reactionary things with which we had to do every day in the course of our studies, which had become loathsome to us, and for this reason we let drive at Mikhnovsky with our heaviest guns.

"Why such a preference for the writers of antiquity?" I asked indignantly. "In what way is Sophocles better than Shakespeare, or Juvenal better than Heine? In what way is Euripides greater than Goethe, or Virgil greater than Schiller? The writers of modern times are closer and more intelligible to us; as for depth of thought or perfection of form, they yield nothing to the leading lights of the ancient world."

"All the best ideas of the ancients have long been absorbed and developed by the more recent European writers," Olinger chimed in. "We must learn the modern languages in which they wrote! This is not the fifteenth century. You yourself taught us that *Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis.*"

Having recovered from his fright, Gogoliev also joined in the attack and shouted in his resounding metallic voice: "What do we want the doddering old classics for? We'd do better to study natural science!"

All the other pupils, each in his own way, supported us energetically, either with pointed remarks or loudly expressed approval. Mikhnovsky found himself under attack from all quarters and didn't know what to do with himself. Fortunately for him, the bell rang, the lesson came to an end, and our red-haired Latin master bolted out of the room as if he had been scalded. His pale face was covered with red patches. All the pupils streamed out after him into the corridor in a noisy, excited crowd, and the news of what had just taken place in the sixth form spread like a whirlwind round the school.

The rumour of the scandal in Mikhnovsky's class very soon spread outside the walls of the school and became the sensation of the town. And the remarkable thing was that although some of the people of 'position' severely condemned the boys, most of the representatives of 'public opinion' in Omsk, including many representatives of the Government and Army bureaucracy, openly sympathized with the 'rebels'. The disintegration of the Tsarist régime on the eve of the twentieth

century had already gone so far that any protest against that régime or against any of its aspects was sure to find a greater or lesser response in many different circles—often in the most unexpected ones. It was the sympathetic attitude of 'public opinion' that compelled Mudrokh, who had at first intended to make an example of the ringleaders, to give up this idea and do his best to 'hush up' the whole affair, which was very unpleasant for him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Circle

ONE DAY TOWARDS the end of November, I was walking home from school with Oliger. We lived near each other and often went home together, talking about all kinds of subjects on the way. All of a sudden Oliger said: "I say, Ivan, let's form a circle?"

"What circle?" I asked in surprise.

I was still very unsophisticated at the time, and Omsk in those days was such a dead-alive place that I had never even heard of any circles till then.

"What do you mean, what circle?" Oliger asked, surprised in his turn.

He was a year and a half older than me and knew more about life.

"We'll form a circle," he went on, warming up to his idea "We'll get together all the most advanced chaps in the school. We'll read and discuss books and periodicals. . . . Then what else can we do? . . . Well, I suppose we can discuss our views, we can learn. . . . Only not as we do at school, but the things we want to know. . . . You see what I mean: what we really want to know!"

Oliger's idea appealed to me. Soon we discovered that we both had the same views on the subject. Instead of going home, we went for a stroll along the Irtysh and began to discuss the details of this attractive scheme. We knew our parents were expecting us home for dinner and that our absence at the usual hour would alarm them, and that later thunder and lightning would descend upon our heads. But what did all that matter compared with the wonderful prospects in front of us? Pleasantly excited, with our overcoats carelessly unbuttoned in spite of the frost and, contrary to regulations, with our satchels under our arms, instead of slung over our shoulders, we walked for a long time on the snow-covered ice of the broad river. We walked and talked, we talked and walked.

First of all we had to decide on the aim of the circle. This didn't take very long. In substance, its aim had already been formulated by Oliger, and with a few additions on my part it was approved by the pair of us.

The question of the meeting-place of the circle was also settled without any difficulty. The majority of the 'Radicals' in our class lived with their families, who were mostly civil service, army, or commercial class. Meeting-places were therefore available. True, some of the parents might object to our plan, but there was sure to be a number of homes where our circle could meet.

Far more complicated was the question of the membership. Who was to be invited to join it? Our heated discussion on the ice of the Irtysh was mainly concentrated on this point.

There were twenty-three boys in our form. The spirit was predominantly 'radical', and the number of 'advanced boys' was comparatively large. They all stood firmly by one another and there were no sneaks among them. For this reason the authorities looked askance at our form, and the supervisor, Soloviov, even considered that such a form should not be tolerated in the school. Olger and I began to go over all our class-mates and ended up by settling on five or six, who with ourselves were to form the nucleus of the circle.

Our first choices were the two Marcovich brothers—Mikhail the elder, and Nathan the younger. They came from a fairly well-to-do Jewish family connected with the local commercial set. They had a two-storeyed house in Omsk and a big farm about a hundred versts from the town. Their father had been dead a long time and they had been brought up by their mother—a good-looking, elegant woman of considerable intellect, but rather unpractical and delicate. She was always surrounded by uncles and cousins, who 'helped her in her affairs'. It always seemed to me that this 'help' didn't amount to much, and must have cost her a pretty penny. The Marcovichs' house was large, comfortable and hospitable, full of young people of both sexes and different ages. You could go there at any time of the day or night and be quite sure of a warm welcome, with tea and food, and, if you liked, a good book to read, for the widow Marcovich was fond of books and had an extensive, well-chosen library. Moreover, the Marcovichs' house stood right by the Irtysh, which was very convenient for boating, bathing and other river-side amusements. Mikhail, the elder brother, was a sedentary, philosophizing boy, who had read a good deal, was cultivated and fond of 'looking deeply into things'. Nathan, the younger, was more lively, practical and active, but less well read and even less inclined to philosophize. At school I was more intimate with Mikhail, who afterwards became a lawyer. Later on in life I had more to do with Nathan, who became a doctor. On that memorable day when Olger and I were on the ice of the Irtysh outlining our scheme for the organization of our circle, the Marcovich brothers and their house occupied an important place in our considerations: this house must become the headquarters of the circle.

We also decided to include in the circle Gogoliev, who had been the starting-point of the scene at Mikhnovsky's lesson, Kovaliov, a red-haired, freckled schoolboy from Semipalatinsk, whose father kept a draper's shop; Petrosov, the quick-witted, clever son of an Omsk lawyer; and lastly, Vesielov, a peasant lad (we should now say 'of kulak origin'), who had unusual abilities and was strong in opposition. We also dis-

cussed for a long time two other candidates—Mikhail Usov and Kolya Ponyagin. Usov was top of the form, knew a good deal and worked hard. He enjoyed great prestige in the form, but seemed to take no interest in social matters. Later on he became a prominent geologist and one of the leading figures of Siberian science. Ponyagin was the son of a teacher of natural history in the girls' high school. He was a clever, sympathetic boy, very keen on collecting butterflies, plants, etc. But beyond his herbarium and collection of insects he took little notice of the outside world with all its discords and contradictions. After much discussion, Oliger and I decided that neither Usov nor Ponyagin were suitable as members of our circle, and we left them out.

Soon our circle began to work at full speed. It was altogether new and fascinating, and unlike anything we had known or done before. We met mostly at the Marcovich's house, sometimes at my parents', sometimes of Oliger's or Petrosov's. The circle had no definite programme of work, and no special leader was appointed. Indeed, we concealed our enterprise not only from our teachers, but also from our parents as we were not at all certain what their attitude would be. As I wrote to Birdie about that time, 'boisterous democracy' flourished in our circle and everybody was equal. Actually, Oliger and I played the most active part, and the rest of the members followed our lead. However, between Oliger and myself there was a great difference in temperament, mental attitude, tastes and general method of approach. In spite of the fact that Oliger was the son of an army chemist of Baltic-German origin, he had an artistic, emotional, impulsive temperament, with sharp alternations of mood and unusual sensibility. He hated any kind of discipline and was inclined by nature to anarchism. He was an ardent admirer of romanticism, loved fine phrases and florid images, and was easily lost in the clouds, letting go the ground from under his feet. In comparison with him (but only in comparison with him!) I was a model of sobriety and reasonableness, I stood with my feet on the ground, I worshipped science and I had a tendency towards orderliness. I often clashed with Oliger, carrying on controversies with him and arguing till we were worn out. The other members of the circle were divided in their sympathies and sided with me or with Oliger according to circumstances.

As a result, the life of the circle went on in a noisy, muddled and disorderly fashion, but it was exceedingly cheerful and high spirited, and was a great stimulus to our development. Left to our own devices, we experimented, made loops and zigzags, and discovered long-known truths, but all the time our minds were working intensively in search of the right path.

We began by a group-reading of Pisarev and Dobroliubov. The latter's famous article, 'When Will the Real Day come?' made a very strong impression on us. We had long discussions about it and compared the 'kingdom of darkness' of the middle of last century with the 'kingdom of darkness' of our own days. We came to the unanimous conclusion that we were still a long way from the 'real day'. Much controversy was also provoked by Pisarev's article, 'Pushkin and Belinsky'. I completely approved the 'dethroning' of Pushkin and the 'utilitarian' point of view developed by Pisarev. Oliger, on the other hand, stood up for

the great poet. This led to a lively discussion on the purpose of literature and art in general, on realism and æstheticism, 'pure poetry' and 'social poetry'. Even in those days, in these semi-puerile arguments, I was a staunch supporter of realism and 'social poetry', and I remained faithful to these principles in later life. Amongst all we thought and talked about in those days, there was no doubt much that was naïve, childish and absurd, but at the same time these arguments and discussions helped to give precision to our ideas, to develop our consciousness and increase our knowledge.

The problems of science, and in particular, of astronomy, played a great part in the work of the circle. This was mainly my concern. My enthusiasm for astronomy was still very great, and the 'stellar influence' gradually affected all the members of the circle, including Olinger. I brought with me and read aloud a book called *The End of the World*, by the French astronomer C. Flammarion, which was very popular in those days. It dealt with the problem of the doom of the earth in a light and entertaining way. This gave rise to a heated discussion lasting several evenings on the origin of the solar system, the birth and extinction of stars, life on other planets and the infinitude of the universe. In the course of our discussion not one stone was left on another of the religious teaching regarding the creation of the world.

Little by little we took to reading our own compositions in the circle. I brought out my article, 'Our High School Science', which I have already mentioned. It touched a warm spot in the hearts of all the members of the circle, and we had long, heated discussions on the 'reforms' to be introduced into the school system. Later on, it was the beginning of 1899, Olinger read us a story he had just written with the title, *The Friend*, which made a deep impression on us. It was written in a childish vein of tragic romanticism, but we only liked it all the more for that. This is the gist of it:

The hero, Nikolai, who tells the story, has a friend called Peter Dartani, whom he regards as a genius and almost worships. Peter, the son of an Italian anarchist and a beautiful fair-haired Russian woman, is young, clever, and extremely well educated, but hopelessly ill with tuberculosis. His mother had died when he was a little boy, and his father had committed suicide in despair. The orphan Peter was left with no means and no one to look after him, and would have fared very badly if a grandmother of his had not opportunely died and left him a substantial fortune. In a moment of expansive sincerity, Peter tells Nikolai about the most remarkable incident of his life—his meeting with the famous eccentric astronomer Steklewski, who had built his own observatory on top of a mountain in the south-west of Russia. Peter was then sixteen, and he came to Steklewski, asking him to accept him as his pupil. On hearing Peter's surname, Steklewski was deeply affected: it turned out that Peter's father had been a friend of his. Peter stayed with Steklewski and studied with him.

After a time Steklewski fell seriously ill, and before his death he revealed his secret to Peter. In his youth, Steklewski had been a Polish revolutionary-nationalist and had taken part in preparing the uprising of 1863. He was living on the mountain at the time, having gone there

for the purposes of the conspiracy; in his solitude he wrote fiery appeals to the Polish people, which were afterwards printed in the near-by town. Soon, however, Steklewski came across a traitor among the revolutionaries, became disillusioned in revolutionaries in general and decided to devote himself to astronomy. He went abroad, where he met Peter's father for the first time. Three years later he returned to his mountain, bringing with him the full equipment for the observatory and, above all, its pride and ornament—the famous telescope, constructed to his own specifications, which was sixteen inches in diameter and gave an amazingly clear picture with a magnifying power of five and a half thousand times! Since then Steklewski had become a recluse, devoting himself to books and astronomical observations. He had studied astronomy, chemistry, physics, geology, botany, zoology, even theology and history, and had made a great number of important discoveries and inventions. And now he was dying prematurely in Peter's arms. And when at last the famous scientist breathed his last, Peter decided that he was worthy of a most remarkable burial: he put Steklewski's body into the tube of his sixteen-inch telescope and walled it up in a stone vault in the heart of the mountain. Thus disappeared for ever both Steklewski and his incomparable instrument.

Having finished his story, Peter took up a violin (in addition to everything else, he was also a remarkable virtuoso and composer) and improvised a majestic 'Song of the Sun', which evoked in ravishing sounds the tragic history of the great light-giver—its birth, development, vigorous maturity, twilight and death. . . .

It is easy to imagine how a work of this kind must have acted on the heated imagination of fifteen- or sixteen-year-old boys. It immediately raised Olier in our estimation to the pedestal of a 'real writer' (as he actually became later on).

But the circle not only had a great educational significance for us, it also mobilized our social energy; and it only needed a certain impulse from outside to cause this energy to flow into the form of practical activity. It was not long before the occasion presented itself.

Russia at that time was already pregnant with the revolution of 1905. In the industrial centres there was already a wave of economic strikes surging throughout conditions among the workers. In Minsk there had already taken place the first conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. The Liberal *bourgeoisie* of the big towns were already beginning to talk openly of the need for a Constitution. The radical intelligentsia were already beginning zealously to assume the pinkish tinge of 'legal Marxism'. In the dark depths of the peasant masses the slow, but threatening upheaval, which was to lead a few years later to a mighty 'agrarian movement', had begun. True, all this was taking place in the great wide world far away from Omsk, a town of which it was said: "If you ride three years, you'll never get there". Nevertheless, the profound unrest which was sweeping the country penetrated, by some unknown, underground paths, into our remote parts, where it met with a varied, and sometimes unexpected, response.

In St. Petersburg, in February, 1899, the students held their first demonstration, during which hundreds of young students were beaten

with knouts by the Cossacks. For those days this was an event of outstanding importance. The news of the students' demonstration spread very quickly throughout the country, and even the Tsarist Government was obliged to publish an official statement about it in the Press. The students who were exiled from St Petersburg arrived in Omsk bringing many sensational stories and a new song which was being sung in the capital and had the refrain.

*O little knout, O little knout,
My little knout so merry!
Do you remember, little knout,
The eighth of February?*

The Petersburg demonstration became, of course, the subject of heated discussion in our circle, and Oliger in particular was very excited by it. It goes without saying that we all sympathized with the students and were indignant at the behaviour of the Tsarist government, but we were in no position as yet to make any reasoned political deductions from it. We merely felt that a breath of fresh air had been wafted towards us from the capital, somewhere in the remote distance, and that it was bound to have some practical effect on our ordinary life at Omsk.

One day at the beginning of March, three of us—myself, Oliger and Gogoliev—were returning home after one of the regular meetings of our circle. Oliger was in a particularly exalted mood and all of a sudden exclaimed: "We must issue a manifesto!"

I did not know what a manifesto meant, but thought it better not to show my ignorance. So I put on an intelligent look and replied: "All right, let's issue one!"

Gogoliev knew even less than I did, but of course he lost no time in joining the majority.

Oliger was highly delighted and suggested we should get down to business at once. He invited Gogoliev and myself to his home, and the three of us lost no time in getting out a manifesto; or rather Oliger took command and Gogoliev and myself carried out his orders. Oliger drafted the text of the 'manifesto' with extraordinary rapidity. I cannot now give the exact text of it, but I remember it was couched in rather high-flown terms, threatened 'terrible retribution' to all 'the bloody dogs, who drink the people's blood' and called on the citizens of Omsk to 'stir themselves and take up the cudgels'. Gogoliev and I did not know what to say about Oliger's production, but in the end we decided not to make any objections, as evidently all 'manifestos' were written in that way, and Oliger must surely know better than we did. Having written the text, however, the author of the 'manifesto' sucked his pencil a long time, wondering how his work ought to be signed. Not finding anything more suitable, apparently, he suddenly pulled the pencil out of his mouth and wrote the word 'We' at the end of the 'manifesto' with a great flourish.

Now it was necessary to make many copies of the 'manifesto'. Oliger ran off to the army dispensary managed by his father, and sneaked away a small hectograph and some ink. The 'manifesto' was quickly copied out

in capital letters (so that the writing should not be recognized) in the duplicating ink, and we then printed off some fifty copies. It was the first time in my life that I had had anything to do with a hectograph, and I liked working it very much. In later life this school-boy apprenticeship stood me in good stead. Then we made some flour paste and began to discuss the best way to organize the bill-posting of our 'manifesto'. It was decided that we should each take a glassful of paste, a brush and a bundle of 'manifestos', and everyone set out for different parts of the town to stick them up. After carrying out our task, all three of us were to meet again at Olinger's house to report results.

I confess that my heart was beating furiously when I separated from Olinger and Gogoliev at the corner of the street and set out on my first illegal adventure. It was already late—about one o'clock in the morning. Omsk was sound asleep. There were no lamps in the town in those days and the streets were wrapped in uncanny darkness. Only the stars twinkled overhead. The snow crunched under my feet, and the glass of paste tied to my belt knocked against my knee under my overcoat. I hurried round my section of the town, choosing the houses and sticking up the 'manifestos' on them. From time to time I stopped and listened if anyone were coming. But a dead stillness reigned on all sides. Only in the market-place I heard in the distance the regular beat of the watchman's clapper¹ and quickly hid myself behind one of the stalls. I pasted the last leaflet on the main doors of Police headquarters and, extremely satisfied with the successful execution of my task, I hurried back to Olinger's house, gulping down the fresh, frosty air as I went. By two o'clock in the morning our 'triumvirate' was re-assembled: the job had been done and half a hundred childish 'manifestos' were gleaming whitely on the houses and fences of the streets of Omsk. We were terribly excited and looking forward to the consequences of our action.

Next day the town was full of whispers, rumours, and gossip about the 'anonymous letters' (the word 'manifesto' did not exist in the vocabulary of the people of Omsk in those days), and Colonel Rozov, the chief of police, was utterly astounded. Grown lazy, and flabby from lack of work, owing to the absence of 'sedition' in Omsk till then, Rozov reported the incident to the Governor-General, set inquiries on foot to catch the 'miscreants' and paced idiotically up and down his office while waiting for results. The high school got to know about the 'manifesto', and all the pupils and teachers were lost in conjectures as to who could have done it. We three boys, however, kept a firm check on our tongues (even the other members of our circle knew nothing), and with a mingled feeling of pride and anxiety observed the hubbub which our action had provoked. In a week's time it became evident that Rozov was unable to discover the 'miscreants', and after another week the stir created by the 'manifesto' began to die down, especially as other big events suddenly appeared on the horizon of our school life.

Towards the end of March, Petrov, our literature teacher, gave us 'The literature in the Catherine period' as the essay subject in our home-work. This subject had only the remotest relation to contemporary life.

¹ In those days the night watchman in Omsk went round the principal streets with wooden clappers.

but such was the atmosphere of the pre-revolutionary period that any spark, even the very smallest, was capable of causing an explosion. We discussed in our circle the subject set and decided to treat it in such a way as to 'set the sky on fire' Olinger, as always with his fiery temperament, set the pace and the tone for the whole affair. Flaunting quotations and fine phrases, Olinger wrote in his essay that 'Catherine pushed her weak-minded husband off the throne'; that, being a very capricious woman, she 'presented hundreds of thousands of serfs to her numerous lovers'; that, while carrying on an enlightened correspondence with Voltaire and Diderot, at the same time she would not tolerate any criticism of her actions on the part of Russian writers; and that all these and many other circumstances had left their mark on the 'literature of Catherine's period'. Olinger's exposition was colourful, vigorous, coherent, but rather disorderly, and above all, excessively daring in the conditions that prevailed at the time I, too, wrote an essay in the same spirit, although it was more modest Gogoliev, the Marcovich brothers, Vesielov and the other members of our circle acted similarly. Not all of them had Olinger's knowledge of literary facts, nor did they all go as far as he did in showing up the political side of the subject, but the fundamental attitude of all of them was the same. At the appointed time we handed in our exercise-books to Petrov, and three days later a storm broke out in the school the like of which had never been known before.

When Petrov came into the class-room with a pile of inspected essays and sat down heavily at his desk, we realized at once from the expression on his face that a storm was brewing. Indeed, after returning almost all the exercise-books to their owners, he laid three or four aside (I recognized my own among them), and then, after casting a menacing look in my direction, he called out loudly "Olinger!"

Olinger got up slowly from his desk.

"I've given you two marks for your essay, Olinger," Petrov went on in an ominous tone of voice. "A five and a one. Do you know why?"

"I don't know," Olinger replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"You don't know? You don't know?" Petrov suddenly began to shout. "Then I'll tell you! You've been given a five for literary style, and a one for subject-matter. Yes, the subject-matter of your essay is outrageous! You dare to attack our state laws and institutions. This is unheard-of! This shakes the very foundations!"

Olinger said nothing and gazed solemnly down at his desk. Petrov picked up my essay and continued in a menacing tone: "What's this you've written here? You've represented the great Empress as a miserable plagiarist of the French encyclopædist. Do you dare to assert that Catherine carried on her liberal-minded correspondence with the western philosophers to the accompaniment of the shrieks of serfs who were being flogged in the stables at the Empress's own orders? This is outrageous!"

And noticing that I was sitting quietly at my desk as though nothing was happening, Petrov suddenly began to roar savagely: "Stand up! Stand up when I speak to you!"

Reluctantly I stood up and gave him a defiant look.

Petrov picked up the third exercise-book and seething with indignation

let fly at Gogoliev. Gogoliev's particular crime consisted in his having inserted in his essay the famous story of 'Potemkin's villages'. Then the attack was continued, though in a milder tone, on the essays of Mikhail Marcovich and Petrosov. Five boys were now standing at their desks, and Petrov's terrifying eloquence poured out as before in an irresistible flood. I got bored with it, and taking advantage of the first break in his tirade, I said. "I don't understand, Nikolai Ivanovich, what you've got to be indignant about. Everybody has the right to express his opinion."

"What? What did you say?" Petrov shrieked. "Do you expect every rascal to be allowed to soil paper with his stinking liquid? Thank God we've got the censorship!"

Then Gogoliev chimed in and said. "What's the good of the censorship? It's unnecessary."

Petrov began to boil with rage. He banged the desk with his fists and began to shout that pupils like Gogoliev were unworthy to be within the walls of the school, and that he would raise the question of his expulsion in the Teachers' Council. This threat infuriated the whole class: we started banging the lids of our desks and made such a deafening noise that Petrov, pale with fright, hurried out into the corridor without waiting for the end of the lesson. We all went home that day in a state of great excitement and with a foreboding of terrible things to come.

Our expectations were fulfilled. Next morning we were told there would be no literature lesson and that in its place we were to have . . . Mudrokh himself! We realized at once there was something behind that. And in fact, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the big, portly figure of the Principal, accompanied by our class-tutor, lurched into the class-room. Mudrokh did not go up on to the master's dais, but stopped beside it and fixed his gaze on the pupils who had stood up when he appeared. Thus he stood several minutes, transferring his gaze from one pupil to another. Perhaps he thought he could hypnotize us in this way? Then he threw himself back, put one foot forward, and thrusting two fingers of his right hand between the buttons of his waistcoat, began in his repugnant, grating voice:

"I want to have a talk with you. You've got wrong ideas in your heads. You will get into trouble. But I can still help to save you."

Convinced of the magic power of his words, he began to prove in a long tedious way how fortunate we were to be 'loyal subjects of His Majesty the Emperor'. Speaking from his own experience, he painted the most gloomy picture of the political chaos, weakness, venality, and crime that prevailed in countries with a constitutional form of government, and kept repeating all the time: "That's how it is in the Austro-Hungarian Empire."

And then, by way of contrast, he described with broad sweeps of the brush the order, power, prosperity, incorruptibility, and enlightenment prevailing in the Russian Empire where there was no constitution, but only a Tsar, who regarded all his subjects as his 'children'. In saying this, he raised his eyes to the ceiling and almost folded his hands devoutly. He concluded with these words: "I have told you, and you must heed what I say. If you don't, there will be trouble."

And the Principal, without a glance at anybody, strode majestically out of the room.

However naive politically we may have been at the time, the effect of Mudrokh's talks was altogether different from what he had evidently expected. It was difficult for us, of course, to judge how far the picture he had painted of Austro-Hungarian conditions was correct; but, on the other hand, we were well acquainted with the conditions in Russia. And for this reason Oliger expressed the general attitude fairly correctly (in some it was more conscious, in others less), when he spat heartily on the floor after the departure of the Principal and exclaimed in deliberate tones: "Uh-uh! The mercenary creature!"

The whole affair had rather painful consequences: half the class were given a 'three' for conduct for the year, a very severe penalty for those days. I was included in this half of the class, and it was decided to expel Oliger from the school. Oliger's father, realizing that this meant that his son would be deprived of the right to enter another school, pulled every available string with the result that Oliger was given the chance to leave the school 'of his own accord'. He disappeared from our class before the examinations in the spring, and in the autumn went to Saratov, where he entered a school of industrial chemistry. About the same time Gogoliev moved to Petrozavodsk, and Petrosov to Ekaterinburg. Our circle was broken up, but the events of the past winter remained in our memory. In my diary for September 18th, 1899, I wrote in somewhat high-flown, romantic strains:

What a winter the last one was! It was a stormy, fighting period in my life, but how much happiness there was in those storms and fights! I get great pleasure out of fighting.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Poetry

ON 4TH SEPTEMBER, 1899, an important event took place in my life: during the Latin lesson I wrote my first piece of poetry. It began with the words.

*Fly on, fly on more quickly, Time,
Full-sail, full-steam ahead!*

and both in its form and its content it was extremely unsatisfactory. But that did not matter at all. The important thing was that suddenly, spontaneously, as though by some sort of inspiration, I began to speak in rhythmic lines. I had had literary inclinations since childhood. As far back as I remember, I was always composing or describing something — a forest after rain, an ambulance station, a trip to Chernoluchye (a

pine wood not far from Omsk), and so on. Having grown up a little, I tried my powers in diaries, school essays, and articles on current topics. In the fifth and sixth forms I aspired to the glory of a publicist, following in the steps of Pisarev and Dobroliubov. But it had never occurred to me before to invade the sphere of *belles-lettres*, let alone poetry. I did not consider I had a vocation for purely artistic, creative work. And then all of a sudden there came this unexpected turn!

I was surprised and fascinated. My first experiment was followed by others. I began to write verses almost every day. They came easily to me. The words fitted easily into the metres, the rhythms flowed one after the other. Inspiration came to me particularly often during lessons —Latin, Greek, physics, literature, and mathematics. Then I would be deaf and blind to all my surroundings and become absorbed in my creative work. In one hour I sometimes managed to write a poem of twenty to twenty-five lines. I was in a state of constant emotional intoxication. I felt that something new, bright, and glowing had come into my life, something that opened up before me alluring vistas of unheard-of beauty. And full of exaltation and enthusiasm, I rushed impetuously forward along the new path.

It was all very fortunate, as by the time I moved up into the seventh form I was undergoing a kind of spiritual crisis. There were several reasons for this.

I spent the summer of 1899 in Omsk at the sanatorium for convalescent soldiers, of which my father had been made the superintendent. It was in a small wood a few versts from the town. The patients were accommodated in tents, and the doctor was provided with a wooden house of the barrack type standing in the middle of a large garden. All our family migrated out to the sanatorium together with Father. The Tchemodanovs came on a visit to us from Moscow. We spent the summer together, and my relations with Birdie became even closer and more complicated than before. We were now fifteen years of age. In the last year Birdie had grown up considerably and was beginning to develop into a woman. She had developed a morbid self-esteem and an extraordinary mistrustfulness. She had become jealous. One day that summer I acquainted her with the map of the stars and then asked her to choose the star she liked most of all. She looked round the sky and pointed to Capella in the constellation of the Waggoner. I laughed and said: "Do you know what star you've chosen? Capella —the star of jealousy."

This made a great impression on Birdie. In the course of the summer we thought, read, and experienced a good deal together, and also—which had not happened before—we quarrelled a good deal. However, for the quarrels I must take a considerable share of the blame myself. My motto that summer was: "I want and I will!" and I put this principle into practice in a brusque, forthright manner, not always showing consideration for other people's feelings, even for the feelings of one so close to me as Birdie. But when the summer was over and Birdie had gone back to Moscow, I felt a poignant sense of loss. I wrote pathetically in my diary: "The little, yellow second-class carriage has taken away all that I hold dear in the world". At the same time I felt I had been

deprived of a rare friend—perhaps even more than a friend—with whom I was accustomed to share all my thoughts, experiences and plans. From that time and right to the end of my schooldays my correspondence with Birdie became more frequent, lengthy and many-sided. Yet it could not fully take the place of personal companionship, and this was bound to leave me with a feeling of discontent and sadness.

Another circumstance which greatly affected my psychology was the disagreement between myself and my parents, especially between my mother and myself, which became very acute about this time. It was nothing really serious. It only meant that we were playing in our house another variation on the theme of 'Fathers and Sons', which is as old as the hills. But it seemed to me then to be something of exceptional importance, and it affected me deeply. My parents, like all parents in general, considered themselves to be the sole repositories of 'truth' and naturally tried to instil this 'truth' into my head. Moreover, owing to my mother's quick, fiery temper she did not always do this with due regard for my self-esteem. Boys of fifteen or sixteen are confoundedly conceited! And besides, I was stubborn and independent by nature.

"Whoever heard the like of it?" my mother would often say. "You're an egotist. You're unfeeling and heartless. You don't get along with anybody. You manage to say something rude and unpleasant to everybody. Is that the way a good son behaves?"

"Why should I be a 'good son'?" I would retort sarcastically. "And what proof is there that so-called 'good sons' are really good?"

"You're young and you don't understand anything!" Mother would work herself up. "I do all I can for your good. When you grow up, you'll be grateful to me."

"Why bother about my good?" I objected. "I can look after myself. I've got a head on my shoulders. You simply want to make me fit into your own conventional framework. But I won't do it. I will not allow parental despotism to restrain my will."

Mother flew into a rage, went red in the face, and shouted that I was an 'impudent brat', that she would wash her hands of me altogether, and that by the time I was forty I would regret my present behaviour. Then slamming the door, she went off to her room. In the evening I took up my diary and wrote down something like this:

"My personality is a ship. Reason is my helm, which the ship obeys. Turn the wheel and the ship will turn. But first you must learn how to turn the wheel."

As my mother did not bother very much about turning the helm, the quarrels continued and the disagreement grew deeper. And so it went on till the end of my schooldays. Only in the summer of 1901, before I left to go to the University, when my mother realized and accepted the fact that I was no longer a child but an adult, was peace restored to the family, and we became good friends again. However, in the autumn of 1899 the war of 'Fathers and Sons' was at its height. I fought the war stubbornly and energetically, but still it was depressing and, to some extent, it disturbed my peace of mind.

Another circumstance—and a very important one—which affected

my state of mind, was the high school. After all I had gone through in the winter of 1898-99, the school now roused in me only one feeling—profound disgust—and one desire—to get as far away from its walls as possible. Every fig-leaf had been finally torn off during the events of the past year. The Principal, the supervisor, the masters, the lessons, the system of education and even the school building itself had become hateful and repulsive to me. Full of despair I wrote to Birdie: "It positively horrifies me to think that I have still another two years of school in front of me." Besides, our friendly and militant form had somehow become devitalised and leaderless: Olinger was no longer there, Gogoliev and Petrosov had moved to other towns, our old circle was broken up and there was no suitable material among the remaining pupils with which to form a new one. I found myself to some extent spiritually isolated, a condition which was partly mitigated by my friendship with Mikhail Marcovich, who sat at the same desk with me in the seventh form.

All these things taken together—my separation from Birdie, the discord at home, my hostility to school, the breaking up of the circle, Olinger's leaving—made me lonely, sad and restless. I could not settle down. I seemed to regret something, to want something, to aspire to something. Poetry gave me an immediate outlet, and at the same time put an end to all these moods and carried me on the wings of creative enthusiasm far away into the unknown distance. . . .

It was not long before a chance occurrence suddenly gave me the reputation of a 'poet', at least within the walls of my school. It happened like this. The Anglo-Boer War broke out in South Africa. It created a great stir in the political world of those days. Russia immediately took the side of the Boers against England. Moreover, in this connection a curious convergence of two absolutely opposite political tendencies took place. The Tsarist Government and the official circles connected with it sympathized with the Boers, because the interests of 'Imperialist Russia' conflicted with those of Great Britain, especially in Asia.

The liberal, radical and progressive sections in general, who were opposed to Tsarism in questions of internal politics, in this case sympathized with the Boers because they were outraged, as they then said, at an "attack on the weak by the strong". Consequently, the whole of Russia, both officialdom and the opposition, was on the side of the Boers, and this was reflected even in Omsk. At that time the Boers' national anthem was sung in all homes, and the portraits of the Boer leaders were hung on the walls, while in the army, administrative and educational establishments collections of money 'for the Boers' were made with the permission of the authorities. A collection was also announced at our school. I was an ardent 'pro-Boer' and carried on an energetic campaign in support of the collection. In our form my efforts were crowned with success—the collection amounted to twenty roubles, but on the other hand all the boys in form eight, except two, refused to give anything at all. I was very indignant, and during the next long interval there was a big row between the seventh and eighth forms, which nearly ended in blows. My sympathy for the Boers

increased each month the war went on. I rejoiced in their victories and grieved at their defeats. I lived heart and soul in South Africa and longed to go and fight for the Boers. My poetic imagination was enthralled by the dramatic events in the Transvaal and the Orange Republic.

One day Petrov, the literature teacher, referred to the Anglo-Boer war during his class and made us a long political speech. The form was very pleased with this excursion into contemporary affairs and immediately began to hum with questions and comments. Suddenly Mikhail Marcovich blurted out without warning me: "Are you aware, Nikolai Ivanovich, that my neighbour has written a poem on the Boers?"

"What poem?" Petrov asked quickly.

I was caught off my guard and at Petrov's request I was obliged to give him the poem I had written the day before. It was called "St. Helena" and was inspired by the fact that the Boer General, Kronje, after being captured by the British, was interned on the island of St. Helena. Petrov took the sheet of paper and began to read out loud:

*Amid the stormy, foaming waste
There stands a rocky isle,
And day and night the unfriendly sea
Roars loudly all the while.*

"Not bad! Not bad!" he said. "Although one feels the influence of Lermontov."

The poem goes on to tell with much pathos how a man stands on that rock all the time, his eyes fixed on the horizon; how 'painful thoughts flit' behind his haughty brow, how he frets like a lion in his cage of stone and yearns with all his soul for his native land, "where friends are dying for freedom, where bullets and shells are whistling". But—alas!—there is only a wilderness of water, all around, holding the prisoner more firmly than any chains. The poem ended with the stanzas:

*He wanders by the water's edge
With anger in his gaze,
And ever keeps his eyes upon
The deep, mysterious haze.*

*The endless sea spreads all around,
The sullen breakers sigh,
The hurricane rumbles across the waste
And sea-gulls mournfully cry. . . .*

Petrov finished reading, smoothed out the paper and summed up: "A very praiseworthy effort."

At the end of the lesson he took the poem with him to the teachers' room, and the following day the whole school knew that they had a new poet in their midst, a home-grown poet. My poem was passed round, copied out, read and even learnt off by heart. My reputation as a 'devotee of the Muses' was established immediately.

Not long afterwards I succeeded in enhancing and consolidating this

reputation still further. One day Mikhnovsky gave us fifteen lines from Virgil's *Aeneid* to translate during the lesson. Suddenly Marcovich whispered in my ear: "Why don't you translate it into verse?"

"Eureka!" I exclaimed, smacking myself on the forehead. "That's an excellent idea!"

So I set about the task. The translation went easily, and at the end of forty minutes I handed up to Mikhnovsky my exercise-book, in which I had translated twenty-five instead of fifteen lines. Mikhnovsky, as usual, began to examine the work completed during the lesson. When he got to mine, a look of surprise came into his face, which increased when he had finished reading. He gave me a suspicious look and asked. "Who wrote this? Did you write it yourself?"

"Of course I did," I said, feeling rather offended.

"It's good, very good," Mikhnovsky went on. "I like the idea of doing a Russian translation of Virgil in iambic pentameters as you have done, and not in hexameters as in the original. Done that way it is lively and is more in keeping with the spirit of the Russian language."

My work found its way once again into the teachers' room, and at the fifth lesson that day Sementkovsky, the Greek master, asked me an unexpected question: "I'm really jealous. . . . You have translated Virgil into verse—won't you give me a treat, too, by translating Homer into verse?"

Why? Because at school I had no feeling for Greek and did not understand it. In spite of all my hostility to classicism, Latin made a very strong impression on me with its majesty, logic and sonorousness. But I did not like Greek. So Sementkovsky never got any translations of Homer from me. On the other hand, I delighted in translating the Latin poets and achieved a fair amount of skill in this field. Mikhnovsky, who could never get over last year's affair, seeing that I was a steady worker, gradually began to soften, and at one time it seemed as though my relations with him would improve. This, however, was hindered by Horace, or rather, by the famous *Tenth Ode* of Horace. Mikhnovsky asked me to translate it into verse. I agreed and one day I brought my Russian translation into class.¹

¹ The following is Theodore Martin's translation of this ode:

*If thou wouldest live secure and free,
Thou wilt not keep far out at sea,
Licinius, evermore.
Nor, fearful of the gales that sweep
The ocean wide, too closely creep
Along the treacherous shore.*

*The man, who, with a soul serene,
Doth cultivate the golden mean,
Escapes alike from all
The squalor of a sordid cot,
And from the jealousies begot
By wealth in lordly hall.*

*The mighty pine is evermost
By wild winds swayed about and tossed,
With most disastrous crash
Fall high-topped towers, and ever, where*

Mikhnovsky was very pleased and lavished compliments on my translation. But then, contrary to his custom, he went on to deal with the characteristics of Horace and of the *Tenth Ode* in particular. He extolled in every possible way the philosophy of the 'golden mean', of which Horace was so illustrious a representative. The demon of contradiction was aroused in me immediately.

"Alexander Ignatiyevich, why do you think that the 'golden mean' is such a good thing?" I asked, interrupting his flow of eloquence. "Did Prometheus represent the 'golden mean'? Did Socrates represent the 'golden mean'? Did Columbus represent the 'golden mean'? It seems to me, on the contrary, that everything great in history was done not by people who represented the 'golden mean', but by people of daring, people who were the complete negation of this 'golden mean'."

Mikhnovsky boiled over with rage, and looking at me sternly through his gold-rimmed spectacles, he explained irritably that in life one often came across 'dangerous dreamers', who ruined themselves irretrievably and gave no peace to others. Such people were a curse to their country and caused absolutely needless trouble to the authorities.

"Beware of such people!" Mikhnovsky exclaimed with a tragic gesture. "Keep away from such people! They won't lead you to any good."

Everybody understood who the Latin master was aiming at. I took up the challenge and made a passionate attack on Horace.

"Who is Horace?" I exclaimed. "A lackey, who toadies to Mæcenas and cringes to him. What is his teaching? The lowest philistinism. He has the basest spirit. He reeks of decay and moral corruption. And yet they want to hold him up to us as an ideal worthy of imitation."

Mikhnovsky jumped up from his desk, and a violent argument began between us, in which each provoked the other. It was reminiscent of last year's conflict over classicism. The Marcovich brothers and some of the other boys backed me up. The argument, as was to be expected, ended in a quarrel, the result of which was that Mikhnovsky adopted

*The mountain's summit points in air
Do bolted lightnings flash*

*When fortune frowns, a well-trained mind
Will hope for change, when she is kind,
A change no less will fear.
If haggard winters o'er the land
By Jove are spread, at his command
In time they disappear.*

*Though now they may, be sure of this,
Things will not always go amiss,
Not always bend in we
Apollo his dread bow, but takes
The lyre, and from her trance awakes
The Muse with touch of fire.*

*Though sorrows strike, and comrades shrink,
You never let your spirits sink,
But to yourself be true;
So wisely, when yourself you find
Scudding before too fair a wind
Take in a reef or two.*

a strictly official and even a hostile tone towards me, and I stopped translating Latin poets. However, my reputation as a 'poet' was by this time so firmly established in the school that it was easy for me to give up these rambles in the gardens of Latin literature.

In spite of the fact that my moods in the winter of 1899-1900 were melancholy and set in a minor key, my search for the lights of life continued. And it was a very intensive search, only it inevitably bore the stamp of these moods. I read a good deal, but I was now mostly attracted to melancholy, demonic, soul-stirring literature. At this period Byron made an irresistible impression on me. I was enthusiastic about him to the point of self-forgetfulness. I knew lots of his lyrical poems by heart and could recite whole pages of *Childe Harold*, but most of all I was carried away by *Manfred* and *Cain*. I considered *Cain* the greatest work of the nineteenth century, and it was alone in my room with *Cain* in my hands that I saw in the new twentieth century. Under my influence a small circle of 'Byronists', who had read and re-read the great English poet, was formed in our class. I was also very fond of Lermontov—especially his *Mtsyri*, which I learnt by heart. That winter I read a good deal of Leo Tolstoy, and although I had a dual approach to him, his works undoubtedly influenced my development. This was in part due to the fact that Mikhail Marcovich was a great admirer of Tolstoy. However, unlike myself who appreciated Tolstoy as a great writer, Marcovich had a high opinion of his philosophy and was even half inclined to consider himself a 'Tolstoyan'.

When the spring came and the earth was covered with a carpet of fresh green, Mikhail and I discovered a pleasure beyond all comparison. We took a small rowing-boat from near the bridge and went up the Om. The town was left behind. We pulled slowly over the peaceful water. Fields, copses, sand dunes, low-hanging clumps of willows glided dreamily past. Then we would put into some convenient back-water and jump out of the boat. Taking off our boots and shirts, we would lie down on the hot, sun-scorched sandbank. Placing our hands under our heads, we lay in silence for a long while, gazing up at the distant blue sky, our hearts being filled with a peculiar and wonderful emotion. We seemed to be merged with the whole of surrounding Nature, as though we were an organic part of it. We seemed to hear the mighty, many-toned song of existence and to feel the rhythm in every insect, every flower. We did not speak, we listened and thought. And our hearts, transported somewhere far away and above us, were filled with a deep, almost reverential ecstasy. . . .

Since then I have seen a good many places. I have seen the Caucasus and the Alps. I have visited the Norwegian fjords and the French Riviera. I have heard the breakers of the Atlantic and the roar of the waves of the Pacific on the shores of Japan. . . . But never and nowhere have I experienced that keen, absorbing sense of the beauty of Nature that I felt on the quiet bank of the Om, in the simple setting of an ordinary Siberian river lined with ordinary Siberian willows. That's what it is to be sixteen, before one's soul is cluttered up with a superabundance of impressions!

When silence became irksome, we indulged in heart-to-heart talks.

In such surroundings, and in such a mood, we were loath to talk about the trivial things of our lives. Of their own accord, great thoughts on great questions came into our minds. Most often, by one way or another, we came to the fundamental question which has occupied so many philosophers in the past and which so deeply agitates every youthful soul: what is the meaning of life? In what does the happiness of man consist?

To solve these questions Mikhail always invoked Leo Tolstoy, while I attacked Tolstoy with all the strength of conviction I could command at the time. I remember we one day talked about *War and Peace* and *Resurrection*, which I had read not long before.

"*War and Peace* is a magnificent novel, the work of a genius," I said enthusiastically. "It's the finest novel in Russian literature, indeed in world literature, as far as I know world literature. Tolstoy is much greater and more profound than Turgeniev. But I don't care much for the ideas Tolstoy expresses in the novel. . . ."

"But what have you got to say about *Resurrection*?" Mikhail interrupted, gazing thoughtfully at the distant green fields stretching away on the other side of the Om.

"I liked *Resurrection* very much," I answered. "The pictures of life in high society, the law courts and prison are remarkable. But the trend of the book grates on me. I am not moved by the tragedy of Nekhludov. He makes such a terrible fuss of himself, of every emotion and every experience. You often feel like saying: 'Do drop your gentleman's fads!' And, on the whole, I don't understand and don't approve of the spirit of Tolstoy's new teaching. . . ."

"You're thinking of non-resistance?" Mikhail asked, even more thoughtfully.

"Yes," I answered. "If some scoundrel comes into my home and starts smashing everything and turning the whole place upside down, have I got to offer him my cheek also? No; that's not my character! Besides, it's against human nature."

"But perhaps in that lies the highest wisdom and the greatest happiness?" Mikhail rejoined.

"No; I don't understand that kind of moral teaching," I exclaimed. "Life is struggle! The greatest happiness is to love some idea with a love that only man is capable of. To serve the idea, to work for the idea, to think about the idea, and for the sake of the idea, to sacrifice everything—friendship, love, life and honour."

"Even honour?" Mikhail remarked doubtfully.

"Yes, even honour," I answered warmly. "But only on the condition that such a sacrifice does not harm the idea in the public mind."

Another day we had a long discussion on love, the family and women. The occasion for it was once again Tolstoy. Both of us had recently read the *Kreutzer Sonata* and were deeply impressed by that remarkable work. Mikhail was inclined to take Tolstoy's point of view, whereas the latter's philosophy roused my utmost indignation.

"You understand, Mikhail," I said, "I have a profound respect for Tolstoy as a great writer. No doubt he is the greatest writer in Russian literature. But his ideas often make me furious. Take, for instance, his attitude to women. What rôle does he give them? What, after all,

does Natasha become in *War and Peace*? A stout, self-satisfied female. And that's all. Yet Natasha was Tolstoy's ideal. It's even worse in the *Kreutzer Sonata*. . . ."

"Perhaps it's better like that?" Mikhail objected. "In our Jewish families the women usually busy themselves with the family, the children and the housekeeping, and Jewish family ties are of the strongest. Husbands and wives live better among us than among you Orthodox."

"You're a rank reactionary," I blazed up. "You'll soon be sticking up for the *Domostroi*.¹

"Nothing of the sort!" Mikhail retorted indignantly. "Only I'm convinced that a good woman must live for her family. And what do you expect of a wife?"

We were both lying on the sandy bank of the river, with our bare backs exposed to the rays of the hot afternoon sun. The weeping willows stood with their branches dipped in the gently flowing water. From somewhere high above, in the clear spring air, birds twittered. Mikhail's question set me thinking. After a short silence I replied more calmly: "A wife, in my opinion, should be the best and dearest friend of her husband; not only a loving wife, but a friend as well. Husband and wife are a spiritual whole, proceeding from similarity of views and convictions. There must be complete equality between husband and wife."

Mikhail laughed and added "You want the impossible. Besides, is it necessary? . . ."

I spent the summer of 1900 with Birdie again. This time our families had decided to arrange a 'gathering' at Sarapul, where some relations of ours lived. At the end of May I set out for Moscow and from there I went to Sarapul with the Tchemodanov family. Next day my mother arrived at Sarapul with the rest of the children. We settled down with all our relations in a large wooden house surrounded by a large but neglected garden, and passed the whole of the summer in this quiet little town on the River Kama.

Birdie had finished at the high school (in those days the high schools for girls had seven forms) and because of this seemed to have jumped all at once into the ranks of the 'grown-ups'. Besides, she had developed considerably in mind and body during the past year. She was no longer a child, as she had been at the Military Sanatorium. She had grown into a young woman, and although she was only sixteen, she had a mature mind and understanding. I, who had another whole year at school in front of me, felt almost a boy compared with her. Formerly in our dual *entente* it had been I who usually played first fiddle, Birdie being content with the position of junior member. Now the rôles were reversed, and I could not help looking up to her. Besides, I had a special reason for this.

During that summer at Sarapul my great anxiety was to know whether I really possessed the gift of writing poetry.

¹ A sixteenth-century book dealing with the regulation of family life.

To write and create had already become a necessity to me. Verses shaped themselves of their own accord in my head, and my hands involuntarily reached out for pen and paper. And the result seemed to be fairly competent. But did that mean that I really had a gift for writing great poetry? At sixteen everybody writes verses, but Pushkins and Nekrasovs are born only once in a hundred years. Then what was I? Just an ordinary school verse-scribbler or one who had really been touched by the 'sacred fire'?

There were frequent and abrupt changes in my mood, which wavered first in one and then another direction. Sometimes it seemed to me that the fires of talent were burning in my soul and that I was destined to be a great poet. Then I imagined myself to be a second Nekrasov (I only paid attention to 'social poetry') and painted vivid pictures to myself of how I would devote my whole talent to the people's cause, and how my passionate verse would strike people's hearts 'with unparalleled force'. At such moments I felt happy, strong, and invincible. At other times, however, it seemed to me that I had no talent whatever, that my verses were quite worthless and that all my creative endeavours were merely 'the chafing of captive thought'. Then I would become despondent and depressed, and lose confidence in my ability. At such times I was gloomy and unsociable, and I was fond of reciting Heine's well-known poem 'Warum':

*Warum sind denn die Rosen so blass,
O, sprich, mein Lieb, warum?
Warum sind denn im grünen Grass
Die blauen Veilchen so stumm?*¹

After reciting this wonderful poem right through, I asked myself, in profound pessimism, the question: 'Are not life, humanity, nature, ideas, thoughts, feelings, joys, sorrows, aspirations, just one fatal "Why"?'

I carefully concealed my moments of depression from everybody, but I opened my heart to Birdie. I sought consolation and approval from her, and she gave it me. She soothed me with an ease of which only a woman is capable, and restored my confidence in myself. One incident, in particular, engraved itself on my memory.

One quiet moonlit night I was returning with Birdie on a steamer from Chistopol, where we had been to see a friend off to Sarapul. We had no desire to sleep, and we sat a long while on deck enjoying the scenery. The dark waters of the mighty River Kama gleamed quietly in the silver moonlight. The steep banks covered with dense pine woods hung darkly over the noisy rushing water. The regular strokes of the steamer's paddle-wheels reverberated loudly along the banks, awaking long-drawn-out echoes and dying away somewhere in the distance.

After a while we began to talk. I touched again on the question that was worrying me. I spent a long while proving to Birdie how important it was for me to have the gift of writing poetry: I would

¹ Why are the roses so pale, O tell me, my beloved, why? Why are the blue violets in the green grass so mute?

move mountains, I would strike at the very heart of the 'rejoicing and idly prattling', with my songs I would inspire the people to fight. I ended up with the distressing exclamation: "If I don't become a great poet, it isn't worth while living!"

Birdie placed her hand on my shoulder in a friendly way and said with feeling: "Life is worth while, even if you don't become a great poet".

Birdie was right. Since then more than forty years have passed. I have become neither a great nor even a minor poet. And yet, when I look back at the whole of the road I have travelled, I can exclaim with deep conviction: "Salute to life!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Tragedy of a Church Organist

IN THE AUTUMN of 1900 I began to take private lessons in German. My mother held that every educated person should know at least one foreign language well, but she left the choice of the language to me. I decided on German, and the reason for this was Heine. I had already begun to read his works when I was in the sixth form, and they had made a great impression on me. This love for the great German poet subsequently increased side by side with my enthusiasm for other writers, particularly Byron—and by the time I was in the eighth form it had become a real passion, which gradually ousted all my former literary 'gods'. Birdie sent me a portrait of Heine. I hung it up over my table and admired it every minute.

I have never seen a finer face than Heine's, I wrote to Birdie at the time, and then added: Every day I discover more and more excellences in Heine and am convinced that this perpetually satirical, perpetually sceptical Aristophanes of the nineteenth century is one of the greatest geniuses and judges of the human soul in general and of the people of our times in particular. Heine is humanity. He personifies it to perfection as nobody else has done. In him is reflected all the good and bad in humanity, the wide and motley panorama of the human market-place, all its suffering and sorrow, all its anger and indignation. And that is why I love Heine so much! In short, I shall always be faithful to him.

This last remark was prophetic. Of all the literary enthusiasms of my schooldays that for Heine proved to be the longest lived, the most enduring. I have retained it the whole of my life, and even now, in moments of thoughtfulness or relaxation, I like to turn over the pages of a book of verse of this unique, incomparable poet. And so I decided to study German.

My teacher was the organist of the Lutheran church in Omsk and his name was Braun. Although in our town he passed for a 'German', he was actually a Lett from Riga, who had been through the German grammar school there. How old he was I cannot say: he always evaded that question, like all others relating to his past. It was not until later that I came to know why. From his appearance he might have been fifty. He had greying hair which came low over his forehead and bristled like a hedgehog and was always shining with oil. With his neatly-trimmed beard and moustache and the network of wrinkles on his pale face he looked like a dried-up, shrivelled lemon. Only his dark eyes, which were sharp and had a slightly scared look, seemed somehow out of harmony with his general appearance: they looked just as though they had been taken from another man and stuck haphazard in this face. Braun dressed quite simply, but neatly and tidily, and when walking in the street was fond of smoking a pipe.

At first our relations during the lessons were very formal. One lesson we devoted to reading Heine's *Pictures of Travel*, and another to conversation, in which we talked about the most harmless 'non-controversial' subjects, such as the weather, places of interest in Omsk, the form marks for the term, and similar matters of little interest. Gradually, however, the ice began to thaw, and our relations became more human. My fondness for the organ played a great part in helping me to a better acquaintance with my teacher. This instrument has always given me sincere pleasure. Even now I consider the organ the greatest and most inspiring musical instrument man has invented. More than any other, it is able to subdue and captivate the soul. Braun began to take me to the church when there was no service, and gave wonderful performances for me. He was a good musician and loved his art passionately. Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and many other composers were revealed to me in their magnificent works, and it was in that church that I first came to understand and to feel the incomparable majesty of Beethoven, who has remained my 'god' of music throughout my life.

The organ paved the way for my friendship with the teacher. He lived at the church in a little flat consisting of a couple of tiny rooms and a kitchen, and often invited me there after these concerts for a glass of tea. He lived alone, as an old bachelor, kept his rooms spotlessly clean, and did all his own simple housekeeping. Little by little I got so accustomed to Braun's flat that I began to feel at home there and sometimes took the liberty of rummaging in his bookshelves and odd corners. One day we went to his place after a magnificent Bach recital. We were both in an uplifted, almost joyous mood. The dusk of early winter was falling, and the teacher went at once into the kitchen to make the tea. I went up to a small bookcase and after rummaging a little in some old illustrated magazine I pulled out an old faded album of photographs. I began mechanically to turn over the pages. The faces were quite unknown to me, but I could see by the dresses and coiffures of the women that all the portraits belonged to the 'seventies and 'eighties of the previous century. One photograph in particular drew my attention: it showed a young girl with a long, thick plait, in the style of Goethe's

Gretchen. The face could not be called pretty, but there was a good deal of gentle charm in it.

"Who is that?" I asked Braun, when he set the tea and some pastries on the table.

I shall never forget the effect that my innocent question produced. Braun's face suddenly changed, darkened, and became even more wrinkled. A strange sound, between a sob and a groan, escaped from his lips. He walked abruptly away from the table and stood motionless at the frozen window with his face pressed against it. I could not understand what was the matter, but I realized immediately that my question had touched a secret, unhealed wound. I was embarrassed, but did not know how to get out of the situation. A few minutes passed in awkward silence. At last Braun controlled himself, came back to the table and poured out a glass of tea for each of us. But all his recent animation aroused by Bach had completely disappeared. He was now gloomy and sullen, and seemed to me to stoop more than ever. Without a word we drank the tea in an atmosphere of tension, and I got up to go as quickly as I could. I wanted, however, somehow to smooth over my lack of tact, and said as I took leave of him: "Please forgive me for my inconsiderate question . . . I didn't know . . . I had no idea of causing you any distress."

A shadow seemed to pass over his face, and he answered in a dulled voice: "No, no, why? . . . I understand. . . . Don't worry. . . . It will all pass . . ."

I put on my overcoat and was about to go. But just as I was reaching out for the handle of the door he suddenly started forward convulsively, rushed up to me and taking me by the hand, said in a pleading voice: "Don't go away, for God's sake! Stay with me a while! . . . I'm afraid, I'm afraid! She'll come again! She'll torment me again! . . ."

"Who is she?" I asked in perplexity.

"Do you know who that woman was you were asking about?" he muttered in a hollow voice.

"No, I don't. Who is she?" I replied.

He took a long breath, as though he found it hard to pronounce the word he was about to utter. Then he almost whispered "She is my wife."

Suddenly his voice became a shout "No, I haven't spoken the truth! She is not my wife! . . . She is my bride! . . ."

I realized that I was faced with some painful secret, some old tragedy which had not yet been played out, and I felt sorry for this deeply wounded man. I took off my coat and went back into the room. In the quickly gathering dusk the outlines of things and objects grew softer and hazier. I sat down in an arm-chair a couple of paces from Braun, but in the half-dark it was hard for me to see the expression of his face. He breathed heavily and was quite unable to regain his composure.

"Forgive me for keeping you," he said in an apologetic voice "It will soon pass . . . it will soon pass!"

I did my best to soothe him. I did not ask him to tell me what was troubling him—I thought that would be tactless and cruel. But he himself, it appeared, was seeking an opportunity to unburden his

feelings—he must have kept silent a very long time—and soon the words came pouring out. . . . At first with difficulty, awkwardly, with stutterings and stammerings, like a cart bumping over an uneven road; then more easily, more rapidly and more unrestrained. It was a good thing it was dusk. In the dusk, when you cannot see the expression on your companion's face, it is much easier to speak of intimate, disturbing things. That evening I heard a tale of horror, which might have come out of a novel of the dark Middle Ages, had it not been—alas!—a living reality in the conditions of Tsarist Russia.

My teacher was the son of a small shopkeeper in the neighbourhood of Riga. His father had a great respect for education and strove hard to give his boy the opportunity to finish the German grammar school at Riga. Having been set on his feet, Braun became a teacher. He obtained an appointment at a school in a big Lettish village, and also carried out the duties of organist at the local church. Things went well with him from the start. He was young, full of hope and energy, and the future appeared to him in all the colours of the rainbow. He had plenty of work to do, but he liked it and did it well. The people were sympathetic towards the teacher, and in addition to all this, soon love came to him. At an evening party Braun made the acquaintance of the daughter of the local postmaster—the girl whose photograph I had seen in the album—he felt his heart begin to beat more quickly, and was soon convinced that his feeling was reciprocated. The romance went on for several months, and their passion grew stronger and stronger. At last the wedding was arranged to take place—a few days after the big autumn fair which was held in the village where Braun worked. The young bridegroom lived in a state of rapture, getting his house ready to receive the beloved guest and waiting impatiently for the day when the happy event was to take place.

The day of the fair came round, and people flocked to it from all over the district. There also came to the fair the son of an important German baron, who had a castle in the neighbourhood. There were rumours that the baron's ancestors had been highway robbers and that his grandfather had been a pirate in the Indian Ocean, who had been captured by the British and hanged on a gibbet. The present baron, however, was a man of consequence at the Tsar's court and held various high positions. He lived most of the time in St. Petersburg, and the steward in charge of his country estate fleeced the peasants mercilessly and threatened everyone who complained. That year the baron's son, a young officer of the Cavalry Guards, was spending the summer at the castle, drinking and misbehaving himself with the friends he had brought from the capital. At the fair the whole crew of them behaved rowdily and provocatively, overturning carts, knocking people down and brazenly accosting women. Unfortunately Braun's bride caught the eye of the baron's son. The Guardsman took a fancy to the pretty girl and began to paw her and kiss her in front of everybody. When Braun saw this, he could not restrain himself. He rushed at the officer and pushed him away from his bride. The baron's son was furious and would certainly have thrashed Braun with his whip, if the crowd had not intervened. The noble hooligan retreated before the infuriated people and their

indignant shouts, but as he rode off he swore at Braun and shook his fist at him, saying: "I'll pay you out for this!"

And he kept his word.

The wedding took place on the day arranged. There were many guests, much wine and many good wishes. When everyone had gone, the young couple were left alone and, filled with happiness and love, began to get ready for bed. It was now past midnight. Suddenly at the entrance to the teacher's house, which stood on the edge of the village, there was a noise of wheels followed by loud knocking on the door. Thinking that one of the departed guests had come back, Braun opened the door and was immediately knocked down by a heavy blow on his head. Four strong fellows, servants of the baron, rushed into the house, seized Braun's wife, gagged her, pulled a sack over her head and threw her into a carriage waiting outside. Braun tried to rescue his wife from the kidnappers, but was flung back and beaten. Then the carriage, with his wife and her kidnappers, vanished into the darkness of the night. Frantic and hardly realizing what he was doing, Braun rushed after the carriage along the road to the castle, shouting, calling his wife, cursing the kidnappers and threatening the baron's son with all sorts of punishments. When he at last got to the castle, he found the gates tightly shut. Not a light was to be seen in any of the windows. He beat on the gates, shouting and demanding to be let in, to have his wife given back to him. To all his cries, the dark castle returned only a dead silence. At last a key grated in the lock. In Braun's heart a wild, improbable hope leapt up: perhaps it was his wife! Perhaps the baron's son had come to his senses after all. Perhaps, yielding to the girl's entreaties, he had decided to let her go. . . . But no, three huge wolf-hounds sprang out of the gates and rushed at Braun. He scarcely had time to jump aside, seize a heavy branch and beat the dogs off. The gates slammed to with a crash, and Braun realized that he could expect no mercy from the castle. Pursued by the wolf-hounds and driven by his own desperation, he ran back to the village through the darkness of the night. He woke up the girl's father, who was unaware of anything, and told him what had happened. The postmaster sent a heart-rending telegram to the authorities at Riga, asking for help and protection. But it was four o'clock in the morning, all the officials at Riga were asleep, and the telegraphist on duty was unwilling to disturb the higher authorities at such an early hour. His only reply was "Plenty of things happen. We'll see about it to-morrow."

Meanwhile, the news of the kidnapping of Braun's wife spread round the village. In spite of the early hour people began to gather at the postmaster's house. All were full of indignation, shouting and abusing the baron's son, but nobody wanted to do anything practical. Braun implored them to go with him to the castle and demand the immediate release of his wife, but in vain—the peasants shuffled their feet, scratched the backs of their heads and would not budge. One of the more outspoken said: "H'm—yes! Just you have a try! . . . You'll get your neck broken into the bargain. . . . The baron's well in with the Tsar."

The hours went by. Day came. The postmaster sent another frantic telegram to Riga. In reply he was informed that both telegrams had

been delivered to the authorities, but not a word or a sound had come from them. Braun thought he would go off his head.

Meanwhile vague rumours, no one knew whence they had come, were going round the village of some terrible happenings at the castle during the night. These rumours grew and strengthened until at last someone from the castle came and told in a whisper, as a secret, what had actually happened. Braun's wife had been handed over to the baron's son and his companions. They were all blind drunk and hardly knew what they were doing. The unhappy girl was raped by all of them in turn. She went completely out of her mind and early in the morning threw herself out of a window of the castle and was killed. . . .

It is hard to find words to describe Braun's condition after this tragedy. He was almost out of his mind. He tried to set fire to the castle, but did not succeed. He wanted to hang himself, but was prevented. He had a severe breakdown and spent many months in hospital. He came out a broken man: he seemed to have gone to pieces, to have grown older and to have lost his grip on life. He could not stay any longer in his native place, where everything reminded him of the recent tragedy, and he began to wander about Russia. He was in Odessa, the Caucasus and on the Volga. At last, eight years ago, Fate had cast him up in Omsk.

Braun had remained a widower: the very thought of marriage now filled him with horror. . . .

"But what became of the baron's son?" I asked, when Braun had finished his story. "Was he punished?"

"Punished?" Braun repeated bitterly. "Do such people ever get punished? Wasn't his father closely connected with the Tsar? . . . Well, the day after all this happened the authorities arrived at the castle. The people up there entertained them well, gave them plenty to drink, and then they drew up an official report stating that death was due to the fact that the girl had been drinking heavily and in a state of intoxication had stepped back and accidentally fallen out of the window. That's what they made of it! She herself was to blame. . . . And that was the end of the affair. Yes, there's some truth in the saying: Don't fight with the strong and don't go to law with the rich. . . ."

Braun was lost in thought. I, too, was silent, being deeply stirred by the story I had just heard. It was now night and quite dark in the room, but we had no desire to light the lamps.

At last Braun looked up and said: "Thank you for staying. Talking about it has relieved my feelings. I am better now. Mostly I don't think about that old story. At times it even seems that I have forgotten it. But then something will suddenly remind me of it, and it is as though a knife were cutting my heart to pieces. . . . And at such moments she comes to me. . . . I see her as she was when they seized her: her hands tied, her face pale and bloodless, and her eyes fixed on me reproachfully as though asking: Why do you not save me? . . . Oh! Oh! . . . At such moments I could hang myself. . . ."

He groaned and cracked his fingers. I caught his hand and tried to soothe him. Gradually he recovered his control and seemed to become himself again. Then in a quite different tone, in his ordinary, everyday

voice, he said: "It has got quite dark. I must light the lamp. And it's time for you to go home, otherwise your mama will be worried."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Lights of Life Begin to Glow on My Horizon

FOR A WHOLE week afterwards I went about under the impression of Braun's story. I kept turning it over in my mind and trying to fathom the fundamental and principal thing that lay at the bottom of it. My blood boiled whenever I recalled the horrible injustice of which Braun had been a victim, and the fact that the perpetrator of the abominable crime had escaped all punishment. And why? Merely because he was an officer of the Guards, because his father was in close contact with the Tsar and because both were representatives of the uppermost class in the State. The class structure of the Tsarist form of society appeared to me for the first time in all its abhorrent nakedness, and I could not help thinking about it. I rummaged in my memory, turning over the facts and impressions of the past which had lain there till now like bricks carelessly thrown down. I remembered Sergeant-major Stepanich and my friend Kartashev the recruit; I remembered Goriunov the helmsman and the stories told by 'Grandfather', the political prisoner; I remembered the downtrodden condition and the poverty of the peasants round Moscow with whom I had come in contact at Mazilovo and Kirillovka; I remembered the half-starved existence of the Omsk artisans who had taught me carpentry and metalwork; I remembered hundreds of other 'little facts of life' which had seemed to slip past my consciousness, but which now acquired a very special significance in my eyes. Remembering all this, I put them together, summed them up and for the first time arrived at a conclusion which could be reduced to the formula: 'Down with the Autocracy!' I don't mean to say that I found this exact formula at that time—certainly not. I finished school without having seen a single illegal pamphlet or leaflet, and I adopted the slogan: 'Down with the Autocracy' only in St. Petersburg after I had entered the University. Nevertheless, the conclusions I came to as a result of reflecting on Braun's story were essentially the same. It was precisely at that moment that there flared up in my heart the fierce, burning hatred of Tsarism which soon afterwards led me into the revolutionary camp.

Thus I had found my goal. But what was the road that would bring me to it?

As to this, I was as much in the dark as before. In the winter of 1898-99 I often used to argue with Olinger on the question of legal and illegal forms of work. Olinger supported the idea of founding an 'underground' paper like Herzen's periodical *Kolokol* (in those days in our remote part of the country, in Omsk, we had no idea that 'underground' papers were already in existence). On the other hand, I thought that a progressive legal paper in the style of *Russkoye Bogatstvo* would

be far more useful. Generally in those days I sought to prove that the most important thing for Russia at the time was the education of the people, and that only education could prepare the broad masses to accept 'the idea of equality and freedom'. From this I came to the conclusion that 'the path of peaceful progress' was more solid and speedier than revolutionary upheavals. At the Military Sanatorium and at Sarapul I had many conversations with Birdie on this subject, and my cousin turned out to be an even more out-and-out supporter of 'the cultural approach' than I was myself. It was partly under her influence that I liked to proclaim at the time: "Culture and only culture will lead humanity to happiness!"

Later on, however, I had very strong doubts as to the correctness of this 'cultural approach', and I wrote to Birdie, teasing her, that she was preparing 'by small things to bring about great good'. My doubts increased all the more when Oliger turned up again in Omsk in the autumn of 1900.

During the year we had been separated, many interesting things had happened to my friend. Saratov, where, after leaving our school, he had entered the School of Industrial Chemistry, was at that time, unlike Omsk, already a big revolutionary centre. It had social-democratic groups, students' organizations, factory circles, illegal literature and manifestos. Oliger quickly found his bearings in this 'underground' world and began to play quite a large part in the organization of youth. He studied little and badly, but on the other hand he willingly carried out various risky commissions. In the end he was found out and had to run away to avoid arrest. With great difficulty and after many adventures he managed to cross the frontier illegally and got to Cracow, then in Austro-Hungary. Here he knocked about for a couple of months, spent all his money, tried without success to get a job, and in the end decided to make his way back home. Again he crossed the frontier illegally, but this time in the opposite direction; and giving Saratov a wide berth and taking care to keep out of the way of the police, he managed to get back on the quiet to his native Omsk.

We met like old friends and our relations grew stronger every day. Oliger's plans were at first very vague, and at times fantastic. Now he wanted to become an actor, then he would be a sailor, putting much emphasis on the fact that his uncle had run away to sea at fifteen and remained a sailor all his life. In the end Oliger decided to prepare for matriculation and to sit for the examination as an external student with all of us in the spring of 1901. I began to help him in his preparation. In the long run nothing came of this plan either, and Oliger started out in life as a half-educated high school boy, which, however, did not handicap him in the least in his subsequent career.

I used to see Oliger almost every day. We were never bored and we always found subjects for animated conversation, sitting up in each other's homes till late at night. I particularly liked being with Oliger in his sparsely furnished little room. He usually lay on the bed, I lay on an old battered divan near by, and we would talk, or rather, 'think aloud'. With incredible ease our imagination flew all round the world, we touched on the most varied problems, exchanged views and argued

on the most complex and intricate questions. Often one would express an idea which the other would seize upon and develop. Then the first would take up the game, showing where the other had been wrong and amplifying it in his own way. Then the two of us would be carried away by our speculations and systems, till we suddenly discovered ourselves in a blind alley and would laughingly throw the idea which had interested us into the dust-bin. This was all very jolly and interesting, and these mental gymnastics undoubtedly helped us to develop our dialectical abilities. We shared our thoughts and feelings, dreamed about our future (which, of course, was to bring us fame and success), and talked about humanity, its progress, the discoveries of science and the achievements of literature and art.

Most frequently and seriously, however, we discussed the subject which most interested us at the time—how and by what means could an end be put to the autocracy? In spite of the fact that Oliger had already had some experience of revolutionary circles and had even been ‘in the emigration’, he had no clear answer to this question. There was the same sort of muddle in his head as in mine, and it was heightened, too, by an ardent imagination and a fiery temperament. First he would dream of killing the Tsar and his ministers, then he would predict a mass revolt of the peasantry which would sweep everything off the face of the earth, or he would invent a great scientist who was to make a wonderful, unparalleled discovery, by means of which he would gain power over the world and threateningly announce to all the existing rulers: “Get out or I will annihilate you!”

All this seemed to me very unconvincing and improbable, and I was always saying to him: “That’s not the way to go about it!”

Oliger would reply to this with his favourite saying: “Love us when we’re black; everybody will love us when we’re white.”

Gradually, from the arguments, conversations and exchanges of opinions a certain idea began to emerge. It took form as the result of many influences, but the chief ones were: the revolt of Stenka Razin, the cult of ‘heroes’, which was then being propagated by the ideologist of the Populist movement, N. K. Mikhailovsky, and aristocratic contempt for the ‘mob’, so brilliantly expressed in Byron’s works. The conclusions we drew were dark and fantastic.

“The world must be cleansed with fire!” exclaimed Oliger with the passion peculiar to him.

“Not one stone of the old life must be left upon another!” I rejoined.

Then both of us began eagerly to ransack history in search of the great ‘heroes’ who had passed over the world like a storm Attila, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Napoleon, fired our imaginations.

“I’m immensely impressed by Napoleon,” I said to Oliger one day. “He’s a colossal figure! He spilt much blood, but on the other hand he stirred up to the very bottom the stagnant swamp of European life at the beginning of the nineteenth century . Men of blood are necessary to the world no less than men of ink!”

And as an additional argument I recited with fervour Lermontov’s *Air Ship* and Heine’s *Two Grenadiers*. These two poems at that time had made a great impression on me.

One day at the beginning of 1901 I went to Oliger's and pulling a number of closely written sheets of paper out of my pocket, said imperiously: "Listen!"

Then with some excitement I read out to him a poem in prose which I had composed the day before with the title: "I would be the great Destroyer." All our philosophy of the time was clearly expounded in it. My fantasy began by saying that "a great spirit appeared before me", and as the custom is in such cases, he very conveniently asked me what I wanted. Did I want to be a great poet, or a sage, a great musician, sculptor or artist? The spirit promised to fulfil all my wishes. But I replied: "I don't want to be either a singer or a sage, or an artist, or a sculptor—I want to be the great Destroyer of the old corrupt world! I want to be the avenger of the blood, the tears, the suffering and the injuries of thousands of generations I want to be the terrible leader of all the downtrodden and outraged people of the earth! I don't want love. I want hatred!"

The face of the 'great spirit' darkened on hearing my wish and he asked me to consider carefully before making my final choice. But as I persisted in my wish, the 'great spirit' said: "Very well, I will carry out your desire."

And so I became the 'great Destroyer'. Throngs of people flocked around me, banners fluttered in the air, swords flashed, cities went up in flames, fields were laid waste, blood flowed in endless torrents, and the dark night was lit up with the flames of the old world. Like an all-destroying storm we swept across the terrestrial globe from end to end and wiped off the face of the earth the grandiose edifice of the old, false, rotten life. And the people in their myriads roared deafeningly: "Glory to our great leader! Glory to him for evermore!"

And when at last the terrible storm had passed, and 'the time came to create and build up', the people came to me and asked. "Tell us, leader, what must we do now?"

But my only answer was silence. For I was the storm, not the calm. I could destroy, but I could not build. Then the multitude grew furious, rebelled against me and cried out: "Why did you make us follow you, accursed madman?"

I was cast down from the height into the abyss. The great ecstasy gave place to a great disillusionment!

And suddenly all the life of humanity, with all its sorrows and joys, its anxieties and agitations, seemed to me to be "a sad, unspeakably sad, miserable and ludicrous story. . . ."

Oliger liked my fantasy tremendously. He thought it was not only well written, but even 'profound' in meaning.

He suddenly exclaimed enthusiastically: "Why don't you publish your poem in a paper? In *Sibirskaya Zhizhn*, for instance?"

Sibirskaya Zhizhn (*Siberian Life*) was a Tomsk newspaper. It was a big one for those days and we all had a great respect for it. It was in a different class from our Omsk *Stepnoi Krai* (*The Steppe Country*). The fact that Oliger had mentioned the *Sibirskaya Zhizhn* in this connection was very flattering to my vanity. Nonetheless I did not feel completely satisfied at heart. Although my poem in prose pleased me

as a literary work, it brought out only too clearly the incompleteness of our whole idea and the emptiness of the moods which filled us with so much enthusiasm. It was all very fine: we would stir up millions of the downtrodden and outraged, we would pass over the world like a terrible storm and destroy the old loathsome life to its foundations, and what then? This fundamental question had no answer, and the lack of one disturbed and irritated me.

Nevertheless, Olinger's advice came at the right moment. I took my work to the Omsk representative of the *Sibirskaya Zhizhn*—the old Populist Shakhov—and waited anxiously for results. With what rapturous delight I saw, a couple of weeks later, my fantasy printed in the *Sibirskaya Zhizhn!* It took up two-thirds of the magazine page of the paper, and the heading was printed in beautiful type arranged in a poetic design.

It was a real triumph. Moreover, I received payment for it, the first payment for literary work in my life—6 roubles, 69 kopeks! I took Olinger and a whole group of friends to the "Hotel Europa" (although this was strictly forbidden by the school rules) and we had a real 'banquet' there. Everybody congratulated me on my success and predicted a great literary career for me. It was all very pleasant. Next day, however, I heard something different. Shakhov's wife, a big, masculine woman with close-cropped greying hair, invited me to her house and lectured me severely for the ideas in my work.

"You've got talent," she said rather harshly, addressing me as "thou". "But the content of your fantasy is no good at all. Your ideas are reactionary!"

"Reactionary! How?" I exclaimed indignantly.

In those days I felt myself to be terribly 'revolutionary'. But Madame Shakhov did not agree with me. Like her husband, she was an old Populist, and now attacked me from the point of view of her principles. I held my tongue and listened. I was not altogether convinced by what she said, but I felt that I could not let it go in at one ear and out of the other. It gave an answer to the question that was worrying me: what is to be done next? Only it seemed to me that truth was somehow strangely mingled with untruth in that answer. However, I could not prove this even to myself at the time.

Anyway, I had reached a new landmark in my life. I had 'got into print'!

The same winter my 'fame' as a poet passed beyond the walls of the school and I became an Omsk 'celebrity'.

Just before Christmas a literary-musical evening with dancing was arranged to take place at the school. This was quite an innovation. Nothing like it had ever occurred in our life before. But the growing social movement, of which the increasing 'students' disorders' in those days was one of the symptoms, compelled the Government to manœuvre and to make hesitating attempts, in the way of small concessions in minor matters, to ward off the shock of the approaching storm. Of course it was all quite useless; the tiny cracks opened by the authorities in the tightly-shut windows of the Tsarist régime were powerless to release the highly-charged, thickening atmosphere. Nevertheless, they

brought some changes here and there into the established routine of life. A more 'liberal', or rather a less reactionary, district inspector of education was appointed at Tomsk. He sent to all the schools under his jurisdiction a new programme of studies, which, in the case of the classics lessened the time spent on grammar and increased that given to reading the ancient writers; abolished the holiday tasks and reduced the written home work to nil; gave more independence to the Board of Teachers and recommended the organization of reasonable amusements for the pupils. At the same time a change of Principals took place at our school: Mudrokh resigned, and his place was taken by Golovinsky, who tried to play the part of an 'enlightened man'. Our teacher of literature, Petrov, having with the ability peculiar to him scented 'new tendencies', suddenly changed into a great 'radical' and 'friend of the pupils', ran down the former rules and syllabuses and apologized for the dryness of the teaching with which he had crammed us in the previous years. There also appeared in the school a young teacher of Russian, Vasiliev, married to a girl who had only just left the local girls' school—a merry, exuberant fellow, whose head was full of ideas that had little in common with those of his older colleagues on the Board of Teachers. I became friends with Vasiliev about this time. In a word, light, almost imperceptible currents of something new and unusual, began to blow through the stuffy, vitiated atmosphere of the school and brought a stir into the deadly dullness with which we had been so familiar in the past. The literary-musical evening which I mentioned just now was one of the manifestations of this parsimonious 'liberalism' of the Tsarist educational bureaucracy.

Both the teachers and pupils of the grammar school took part in the evening's programme. Mikhnovsky was the master of ceremonies. Petrov suggested that I should recite one of my own poems. I agreed, but only on condition that the choice of the poem was left to me. The condition was accepted. Then I announced that I would recite "The Heretic", a poem dedicated to the great seventeenth century philosopher and astronomer Giordano Bruno, who was burnt at the stake by order of the Inquisition. I was much interested in that remarkable man at this time and he was one of my heroes in history. To my surprise, Petrov made no objection to my choice, although "The Heretic" was full of the spirit of protest against the Church's superstitious attitude to science. However, this was only one more evidence of the new 'liberal' trend in the school!

The evening brought together the cream of Omsk 'society' from the army and civilian bureaucratic circles, slightly diluted with representatives of the local intelligentsia. Present also were boys of the upper forms of the school and a large number of girls from the high school. Just before the evening I suddenly and most inconveniently fell ill. My mother wanted to keep me at home, but I could not allow that. With a high temperature I set out for the party, but in the atmosphere of bustle and excitement I soon forgot all about the state of my health. When my turn came, I went up on to the platform nervously tugging at the blue tunic of my school uniform. Hundreds of eyes were immediately fixed on me, but I kept my gaze on the narrow



MYSELF, AGED SIXTEEN

gangway between the chairs, and paying no attention to anybody, began to recite my poem in a rather hollow voice. At first I felt a slight embarrassment—it was the first time in my life that I had ever performed before a large audience—but it soon passed. I gained more and more confidence as I went on, and ended up quite satisfactorily.

Applause broke out. The 'gallery', consisting of school boys, simply brought the roof down and loudly called for an encore. I cast a quick glance in their direction and decided to satisfy them. I wanted to recite a poem I had just written on the Boer war, beginning with the words "I dreamed of a deep, dark valley." But just at that moment a grey-haired, weak-sighted little old man with a long nose adorned with spectacles jumped out of the front row on to the platform and shaking me warmly by the hand in front of everybody, shouted in a shrill voice: "I congratulate you. I congratulate you. Our country is not running short of talent!"

It turned out to be the editor of the Omsk newspaper, the *Stepnoi Krai*, who thought it was his duty to give public encouragement to the young poet. I was now really embarrassed and lost no time in vanishing into the adjoining refreshment room where there was tea and fruit. There my form-mates immediately surrounded me and began to toss me in the air to the accompaniment of loud hurrahs. Then Petrov came in and began to shake my hand and thank me for something or other. Then Vasiliev appeared and warmly congratulated me on my success. Then a teacher named Malygin, who was quite unknown to me, patted me on the back and said with great feeling: "Thank you! I'm very glad I came. It gave us a breath of something fresh and alive."

Suddenly, pushing the boys aside, Mikhnovsky came, or rather, ran, up to me and in an excited whisper said: "Come, come. Her Excellency wants to make your acquaintance."

And taking me firmly by the hand, he dragged me along to an ugly, repulsive old woman with black teeth and a yellow wrinkled face.

"Here's our author, your Excellency," said Mikhnovsky, bowing and fawning.

"Akh, I'm delighted, delighted," the Governor's wife said in a jarring voice, as she raised her gold lorgnette to her eyes. "I hope you'll write a poem for me. . . . Very nice, very nice! . . . And bring it yourself."

Her Excellency's breath smelt bad and I felt quite nauseated. I hurriedly murmured something midway between "Go to the devil" and "With pleasure" and then tried to vanish into the crowd. Of course, I did not go to see the Governor's wife, nor did I send her a poem.

Towards the end of the evening I was caught by the new priest at the school, Father Dionisy, who had recently been transferred to us from another town. Father Dionisy gave one the impression of being an artful, cunning gentleman. His cassock was of excellent material, he wore the cross on his chest in a dandified way, and kept his beard carefully clipped and his hair neatly combed. In his walk, bearing, and all his movements and gestures there was something insinuatingly crafty, something unctuously feline, which aroused immediate distrust. I

disliked him at first sight, and as will be seen later on, my instinctive antipathy to our new 'spiritual mentor' proved to be only too well founded. Now, at the party, he praised 'The Heretic' to the skies, and asked me to give him a copy of it to show the 'Right Reverend', i.e. the Bishop. This finally turned me against Father Dionisy. I refused to make any definite promises, and afterwards I forgot all about the priest's request.

My success at the party was beyond doubt. I became the 'hero of the day' and a 'high school star'. My name began to be mentioned frequently in the town. I admit it gave me pleasure, but . . . here is what I wrote to Birdie, summing up my performance:

I don't know why, but I have little faith in the sincerity of most of the praise that has been lavished on me. And even if I am wrong in my suspicions, I don't regret them: there is less chance of my becoming a self-satisfied brute and ceasing to go forward. No; I shall always be dissatisfied with myself and shall always go forward!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Students

SINCE THE TIME of the demonstration of 8th February, 1899, an entirely new and extraordinary category of inhabitants had appeared in Omsk—'exiled students'. The students' movement in the capitals and in the provinces was at that time increasing rapidly and growing stronger. From time to time students' meetings, strikes and demonstrations took place in the university towns. Academic demands were being more and more accompanied with demands of a political nature. The Tsarist Government replied to the disorders among the students with mass repression. The ringleaders were arrested and exiled by administrative order to 'remote parts of the Russian Empire', that is, to the north of European Russia and to Siberia. The rank and file were sent under police supervision to the 'place of habitation of their parents'. As the disorders often led to the closing of the higher educational establishments for a long period, the majority of the students, having been given an unexpected vacation, simply went off to their homes. The result of all this was that a comparatively numerous colony of students from all three categories was formed and systematically maintained in our remote town of Omsk (after all, it was a Siberian town!). It goes without saying that the colony brought a marked liveliness into the social life of Omsk, and became the centre of attraction for all the radically inclined school boys and girls.

I became most intimate with the 'student family' of the Korolevs. There were three of them—the elder brother Sergei, his grown-up sister Natasha, and a young girl called Mani, who for some reason or other was nicknamed 'Parochka'. The Korolevs were of Omsk origin. Their father had long been dead. Their mother, in the last few years, had

suffered from cancer of the stomach, and at the beginning of 1901 called home the elder children, who were studying in St. Petersburg, as she felt her end was near. In fact, she died shortly after their arrival. Sergei and Natasha intended to go back to their studies, but there was another outbreak of student disorders in St. Petersburg just about that time, with the result that all the educational establishments of the capital were closed. So the Korolevs remained at Omsk while waiting for better times. They lived in a big, crooked, weather-beaten house on the edge of the town and wondered what they were to do with it: they had inherited it from their parents and it needed repairing from top to bottom. They had no money for this. Sergei and Natasha often discussed in my presence various plans (including most fantastic ones) for restoring the house, but the matter got no further, and every time I visited my friends I could not help noticing that the steps of their porch were getting more and more dilapidated and rickety.

The head of the family, Sergei, was a pleasant dark-haired young man of twenty-five with the typical face of a Russian intellectual, who was in his fourth year in the faculty of history and philology. He also worked 'for his bread' as a proof-reader in the well-known St Petersburg publishing firm of Marx, which, among other things, published the famous weekly *Niva*. When I first met Sergei he charmed me with his appearance, his liveliness, his youthful radical enthusiasm, and his seemingly extensive and varied knowledge. And the fact that as a proof-reader he was 'closely connected with literature' immediately raised him in my eyes a whole head above other mortals. However, I was soon disillusioned. The more I got to know him, the more convinced I became that he really knew nothing thoroughly, that in his ideas and judgments he floated on the surface and that he could solve everything and reconstruct the whole world in words, but when it came to deeds, he would back out at the slightest obstacle. One day I said rather bitterly to Oliger. "I thought Sergei was a strong, solid person, but in reality he's a perfect modern version of *Rudin*. A nought-man, who needs to have a one in front of him".

Sergei's sister Natasha was of a different cast. She was twenty-two. She had been taking the Higher Courses for Women in St. Petersburg and rather liked to parade her modernity and her connections with the 'illegal world'. She was not good-looking, but she made a very pleasant impression on you, and there was something maternal in her character. She looked after everybody and was always ready to help, and it was only thanks to her that this 'student family' managed to make ends meet in their somewhat disorderly household. In contrast to her brother, Natasha had a deep nature. If she knew anything, she knew it thoroughly. She was strongly inclined towards Marxist views, although she was not an active member of the existing social democratic organization. However, she constantly rendered them services. Sergei, on the other hand, was far removed from Marxism and never went beyond the purely student movement.

Parochka, the third member of this bachelor family, was at that time a high school girl in the fifth form. She ran about with her little thin plait like a mouse's tail doing errands for Sergei and Natasha:

she lighted the samovar, chopped the firewood, fetched the sausage from the shop, and so on. . . .

The Korolevs let-off part of their house to an elderly, invalidish lady named Sannikov, who lived with her daughter Tatiana, a nice-looking, fair girl of twenty. I had met Tatiana the previous summer in the train on the way from Omsk to Moscow, and now renewed my acquaintance with her. The Sannikovs and the Korolevs lived together on friendly terms and formed something like one big family community. It was always merry and noisy in this community, where there were always plenty of high-spirited young people, especially exiled students. The door of the Korolevs' house was always opening and shutting. The humming samovar stood constantly on the table, round which heated arguments went on, and there was laughing and singing. They sang Russian folk-songs and revolutionary songs such as the 'Marseillaise', the 'Red Flag', 'Step Out Together Boldly, Comrades'. Here all the news of the town was to be heard, and all the current events of Russian and international life were discussed.

I liked going to the Korolevs and soon became a constant visitor at their house. Till then I had lived a rather isolated life, associating only with a few individuals of my own age—Birdie, Oliger, Marcovich, and then not with all of them at the same time. I usually had only one friend at any given moment. I never had a group of friends. This had its advantages and its disadvantages. But I suddenly realized I was terribly bored with my hermit's cell and wanted people, noise, bustle, and merriment. There was more than enough of all this at the Korolevs' house, and I began to experience a pleasure I had never known before. I introduced Oliger to my new friends, and he, too, began to be a constant visitor. Soon Oliger had a special reason for his frequent visits: a love-affair began between Tatiana Sannikov and him, which developed at a rapid pace and later was to have very serious consequences. I tried to induce Marcovich, too, to come to the Korolevs' house, but nothing came of my attempts. Marcovich was at that time also in love—with a high-school girl—and the object of his affections was mixed up with an entirely different set of people. My seventeen-year-old heart was then quite free, and I lost no opportunity to make fun of my love-sick friends. One day at the Korolevs when Marcovich, after sitting on thorns for a quarter of an hour, got up and began to say good-bye, on the pretext of having to get back quickly to his sick mother, I exclaimed in a loud voice for everybody to hear: "Listen! Listen! This is impromptu!"

*"Ah, the dear Tolstoyan's done for!
Fate has shown no rue:
The spell that lies upon his eyes
And quells him in mysterious wise
Comes from a ribbon of blue."*

There was a burst of laughter and applause. Marcovich blushed as red as a lobster, gave me a crushing look and went out. It was a long time before he forgave me the joke.

The most pleasant time of all at the Korolevs was the evening tea.

I can remember the scene as though it were to-day. Parochka has just placed the boiling samovar on the table. The plates are filled with bread, sausage, butter, cheese, and all sorts of home-made pickles and pastries. Under the 'lightning' lamp hanging from the ceiling some seven or eight persons are gathered. Natasha is pouring out the tea, Sergei is sitting in the 'chairman's seat' and, tossing back his mop of curly hair, opens the conversation. . . . What about? All sorts of subjects. About the Boer War, the appointment of the new minister of public education, the students' strike at Kazan, the new young writer who has appeared under the original pseudonym of Maxim Gorki.

About that time, it so happened, *Foma Gordeyev* had just appeared. At the Korolevs' we read extracts from the novel at the table, and had discussions and heated arguments about it.

"I don't care for *Gordeyev*," said Sergei, summing up his conclusions. "Of course, it is forcefully written. It's impossible to deny that. . . . But it's coarse and cynical. . . . It's just as though he were punching you in the face with his fist. Say what you like, but I prefer Chekhov. *Three Sisters* is quite another matter! Now there's something to talk about! Real literature in the line of Turgeniev and Dostoevsky. But Gorki smacks of the popular songs people make up on current events."

Although he was only twenty-five, Sergei already had the 'shattered soul' of the Russian intellectual of the end of last century, and in literature he was always attracted to everything that was morbid, rotten, and hopeless. Natasha cautiously opposed her brother Baranov, an exiled Moscow student, who was often at the Korolevs' house and passed for a modern Pechorin, decided to come to the rescue of Sergei. He started to prove that life is a suffocating tomb, that there is no joy in it and that there could be no joy in it, that by their very nature men were evil, and that all great thinkers have been pessimists. In conclusion he solemnly proclaimed: "That philosopher of genius, Schopenhauer, has said: 'The more I know human beings, the more I love dogs'. There is truth for you!"

Whereupon Baranov pointed his forefinger significantly at the ceiling. This made me highly indignant.

"You reason like grave-diggers," I said angrily. "Of course there is a lot of evil in life, but one must fight against it. What do the *Three Sisters* do? They dream all the time about Moscow, but they haven't even got the energy to buy themselves a ticket to get there! Rotten people! And Dostoevsky is a rotten writer! A great talent, but morbid and rotten. I don't like him! When you read a novel of his, the sight of the world makes you sick. But I like Gorki. He's young, boisterous and irresistible. When you read him, you want to fight. That's how it should be!"

"All you want is to fight!" Sergei retorted, in a displeased tone. "In life there are great values—culture, science, art, literature. . . . And you talk about fighting!"

"How can it be otherwise?" I asked excitedly. "Life is very crowded. If you strive to get anywhere, if you want to do anything, you're bound to tread on somebody's foot. I suppose, in your opinion, one shouldn't do anything for fear of treading on somebody's foot?"

Here Natasha intervened and said in a conciliatory voice: "I like *Foma Gordeyev*, but I also read *Three Sisters* with pleasure. Is it impossible to combine the two?"

"It is impossible!" I snapped. "You remember what it says in the Apocalypse? 'So then because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' Good words!"

"Akh, you Vanichka—Bantam-cock!" exclaimed Natasha affectionately, like an elder sister. Then she deftly switched the conversation on to some other subject.

This nickname, 'Vanichka-Bantam-cock', given to me on the spur of the moment by Natasha, stuck to me so firmly that afterwards I was never called by any other name in our circle.

Frequent visitors at the Korolevs were two top-form high-school girls—Musya Leshchinskaya and Tasia Metelina. Musya was a tall, dark Polish girl with a handsome figure and a beautiful voice. She had not read much and in general could not be considered cultured, but on the other hand she sang well and played the piano well. Tasia, on the other hand, was a small, rather fat Siberian girl, who devoured books like sweets and was greatly afflicted by various philosophical problems. She was fond of talking about the meaning of life, the right to happiness, the moral values, and similar high-brow subjects. When we met at the evening tea at the Korolevs, Tasia was sure to raise some serious question and always asked me to explain it, as for some reason she had great confidence in me. I remember one day Tasia began to talk about the incompatibility of personal happiness and service to the community, and hence declared that personal happiness was immoral and must be renounced once and for all. Sergei and Baranov, who were present, strongly objected. They even laid special emphasis on personal happiness and invoked the 'natural rights of man'.

"And what do you think, Vanya?" Tasia appealed to me.

"What do I think?" I repeated.

And then, casting a mischievous glance at Tasia, I recited:

DOKTRIN¹

*Schlage die Trommel und fürchte dich nicht,
Und küsse die Marketenderin!
Das ist die ganze Wissenschaft,
Das ist der Bücher tiefster Sinn.*

¹ Beat your drum loud and be not afraid,
And give the canteen girl a hearty kiss!
This is the sum of all learning and knowledge,
No deeper meaning have books than this.
Drumming, wake people out of their sleep,
Drum the reveille with the vigour of youth,
Drumming, march forward evermore,
This is the sum of knowledge, in truth.

Hegel's philosophy boils down to this,
The sum of all knowledge in this you behold!
I've found it out because I am wise,
Because I myself am a drummer bold.

(From "Zeitungdichte." English translation by GERARD SHELLEY)

*Trommle die Leute aus dem Schlaf,
Trommle Reveille mit Jugendkraft,
Marschiere trommelnd immer voran,
Das ist die ganze Wissenschaft.*

*Das ist die Hegelsche Philosophie,
Das ist der Bucher tiefste Sinn!
Ich hab' sie begriffen, weil ich gescheit,
Und weil ich ein guter Tambour bin.*

"That's what I think about the matter!" I added, and then I recited the Russian translation of this famous poem of Heine's.

Tasia, however, was not satisfied.

"Yes, but if you had to choose between personal happiness and service to the community, which would you choose?"

I thought for a moment, wishing to be honest with myself, and then I answered firmly: "In that case I would choose service to the community."

"So you see, you agree with me! You agree with me, and not with these epicureans," exclaimed Tasia with satisfaction, waving her hand in a gesture of contempt towards Sergei and Baranov.

One evening, when I arrived at the Korolevs' house, I found Sergei in a state of great excitement. He was a little drunk and was pacing up and down the room energetically, tossing his luxurious head of hair and singing loudly:

*"Dead, lie peaceful in the grave,
Living, make the best of life!"*

Sitting about, drinking tea, smoking, reading, talking, and generally occupied, were the members of the family community plus six or seven visitors, including Oliger, Baranov, Musya, Tasia, and a cheerful Tomsk student nicknamed 'Palchik'. Suddenly Sergei stopped and exclaimed: "We're all off colour! Let's do something to shake ourselves up! Something out of the ordinary! Something to clear our heads!"

Then he slapped himself on the forehead as though he had suddenly got an idea. "How is it I didn't think of it before?" he said. "Let's go to Zakhlamino!"

Zakhlamino, as I have already mentioned, was a village about eight versts from Omsk, which the tipsy merchants liked to drive out to in *troikas* to round off their evening's dissipation and go on the spree with the local beauties. The village had a doubtful reputation, and Sergei's proposal was received at first with perplexed silence. But this only lasted a moment. Then the merry Palchik cried out: "Let's go! Let's go!"

He was backed up by Baranov and Oliger. Tasia and Musya with eloquent eyes also gave their consent. The others found it awkward to refuse. I willingly joined the initiators of the scheme as I had long heard about Zakhlamino and was glad of the chance of making its acquaintance at first hand. No sooner said than done. Parochka was sent

out to get sleighs, and half an hour later our whole company, with the exception of Parochka, who was left at home because of her youth, were seated in a big broad sleigh adorned with carpets and a fur rug.

It was a frosty night in March. In the sky a full moon was shining, bathing in its magical blue light the snow-covered fields and silver-powdered trees of the coves. The air was pure and transparent. The horses' hooves rang as they struck the hardened snow of the much-used road. The runners of the sleigh made a cheerful, crunching noise. From the horses' nostrils came clouds of white vapour. The expert driver skilfully handled the reins, which were hung with bells, and the fresh, frosty air, which slightly nipped our cheeks, quivered with their pleasant, melodious sound. I was sitting next to Musya, in whose dark eyes the moonbeams glistened. It was gay, invigorating, youthful, and joyful. One wanted to go on driving like this for ever. . . .

The driver, who knew all the Zakhlamino 'hosts', drove us up to a big, double-fronted cottage and knocked loudly on the gate. The 'host' who came out in answer to the knock—a sprightly, one-eyed peasant, without a beard but with a long Cossack moustache—was rather embarrassed and disappointed when he saw the students' caps and school uniforms, and young girls into the bargain. He was accustomed to a different kind of client altogether. However, he quickly showed us into the parlour, turned up the lamp and asked: "What are your orders?"

Natasha, being used to running a house, immediately answered: "A samovar and some bread and butter. . . . And some milk and meat of some kind, if you have any."

The 'host' sized up Natasha with a contemptuous look, but muttered: "Very good, madam."

Then, glancing at Sergei, he continued: "Some vodka? Beer? How much do you want?"

Sergei, putting on the air of a man used to drinking and dissipation, gave us a quick look and said offhandedly: "Give me a bottle of vodka."

"Only one?" asked the 'host' with surprise, almost with horror.

Sergei looked embarrassed and was going to add something, but Natasha quickly interrupted him: "That's too much! Few of us are drinkers. Half a bottle will be enough!"

Korolev, however, was annoyed at his sister's interference and reacted energetically: "No, give us a whole bottle and half a dozen bottles of beer!"

And so as not to give Natasha a chance to interfere again, he abruptly turned the 'host' round by the shoulders and quickly escorted him out of the parlour.

When the big wooden table, standing in the corner under the ikons, was covered with various eatables, Natasha, as usual, seated herself at the samovar and asked: "Who wants tea?"

"I do," I said.

"Oh, come off it, Vanichka," said Sergei. "You'll have a glass of vodka with us."

"I'm not going to drink!" I replied firmly.

"Not going to drink!" exclaimed Sergei, trying to persuade me. "To the devil with that woman's dish-water!"

And with a gesture he pushed away the glass of tea which Natasha had meanwhile poured out for me. His dictatorial manner annoyed me and, striking an attitude, I caught hold of my glass, and said spitefully: "Spirits are necessary to those who have no inner spirit. But I've got all the inner spirit I need."

"Don't try to be smart, but drink," Oliger butted in, holding a glass of vodka in his hand. "We must all be gay!"

"Don't worry, I can be gay without vodka, perhaps gayer than all of you," I replied.

"Prove it!" said Oliger challengingly.

"So I will!" I retorted in the same tone.

The demon in me was aroused at once. Looking sarcastically round the table, and fixing my eye on Oliger and Tanya who were sitting affectionately side by side, I said: "Dear girls and dear boys! Permit a sober spirit-addict to cheer you up . . ."

"What drivell are you talking, Vanya?" the sensible Tasia exclaimed indignantly. "How can a spirit-addict be sober?"

I got up, and bowing to her mockingly went on: "I assure you, Tasia, in the rich collection of human fauna there is such a rare species. If you haven't come across it before, then take a look at me. . . . Yes, so permit me to amuse you! Joke number one. Nikolai, give me your hand!"

I took Oliger's hand, as palmists do, and having taken a look at the lines on it, I said: "The gods have commanded me to tell you. Never pledge your heart to a woman irretrievably, otherwise you will be ruined".

Tanya blushed deeply and said with annoyance. "Kolya doesn't need your advice!"

Oliger fidgeted awkwardly, but tried to look as if he were greatly amused.

"Joke number two," I went on, looking at Baranov, who, as we all knew, was unsuccessfully wooing Musya. "The great Heine has sent me a special message* for you, which I have taken the liberty of translating into Russian:

*"When a woman jilts thee, weep not,
Love another straightaway!
Better still, sling on thy pack
And boldly go thy way.*

*A lake of blue in a shady wood
Thou'll soon find on the morrow.
There thou wilt weep away thy woes
And all thy trifling sorrow.*

*When thou shalt come to the lofty heights,
Climb up, though you pant as you go!
Aloft the eagles will soar above you,
The dark clouds trail below.*

*(From the *Reisebilder*).

*Thou too shalt be, like an eagle, renewed
 With strength new life will bestow thee;
 And proudly thou'lt feel thou art great and hast lost
 Not much in the world below thee.*

"How spiteful you are!" murmured Musya, looking embarrassed, although there was a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

Natasha intervened, and jerking me by the sleeve, whispered: "Stop it, Vanya. Why spoil our evening?"

Then, trying to appear cheerful, she said out loud: "That's enough poetry, let's sing something! Musya, darling, sing us something!"

Musya, as singers usually do, began by excusing herself, saying that she was not in good form to-day, but in the end she gave in to the general demand. She sat down on a stool in the middle of the parlour, crossed her legs, and clasping her hands round her knee, began to sing in a beautiful soprano:

*A monotonous little bell is ringing,
 And the road stretches dusty and long,
 And afar o'er the wide open country
 Comes the sound of the coach-driver's song."*

Musya sang very well, with great feeling, swaying her body in time with the melody and gazing into space with melancholy eyes. We all joined in. When it came to an end, there was applause. We were not the only ones to clap—our 'host' was applauding at the door and so were a boy and girl, looking over his shoulder, who turned out to be his children. Musya suddenly sprang up from the stool, tapped her heels on the floor and holding up one hand, began to sing 'Kalinka'. The transition from sadness to merriment was so abrupt that for a moment we were all taken aback. But we soon got over that. Musya danced and sang, and all our party, and the 'host' and his children, joined in with gusto:

*"Ahh, kalinka, kalinka, kalinka moyá!
 V sadu yagoda malinka, malinka moyá!"*

Then we started dancing. The table, stools, and benches were pushed to one side, and we stamped our feet on the small clear space. The 'host' and his family, who were now on friendly terms with us, came into the parlour and joined in the fun. We danced a waltz, a mazurka, and a pas d'Espagne. Sergei and the 'host's' daughter danced a Russian dance in fine style. It was noisy, hot, gay, and stuffy in the room. Everybody wanted a drink. The 'host' brought in another bottle of vodka, round which Korolev, Baranov, and Palchik hovered. Olinger and Tanya sat in the corner, billing and cooing tenderly. Sergei, who was now quite drunk, suddenly took it into his head to make love to Musya—the girl went red and white in turns, not knowing what to do. The merry Palchik sat beside Tasia and began to tell her about his life in Tomsk. Natasha and I sat by the samovar, and although I had not

touched a drop of alcohol all the evening, the general atmosphere seemed to have intoxicated me, and my conversation with Natasha was full of a peculiar, most unusual warmth. Natasha told me about her childhood and the recent death of her mother, whom she had loved passionately, and I told her about my troubles at home, my quarrels and clashes with my mother.

We went home in the early hours of the morning. The moon was now sinking below the horizon, and the trees cast weird, long shadows over the snow. It had got colder, and prickly white rime formed on moustaches and eyebrows. We were all tired with the vodka, the dancing, and our recent impressions. We talked little and lazily. Olier nodded, sitting close to Tanya. Sergei, who had drunk more than anybody else, snored loudly with his head resting on Palchik's chest. The driver whistled from time to time and cracked his whip. The horses dashed along and the sleigh bells jingled melodiously and merrily. I sat huddled in the corner of the sleigh, and my thoughts ran on. I thought how broad life is, how much beauty there is in it, how friendship, love, and poetry enrich it. I thought that perhaps I had been wrong to spend so much time on my solitary quests and to stand aside like a Spartan from the charms of life of which others availed themselves so amply. . . .

CHAPTER TWENTY

Political Economy

ALL THESE THOUGHTS and feelings, inspired by the moonlit night and the party at Zakhlamino, vanished like smoke the very next day.

On getting to school next morning, I heard the astounding news that late last evening the police had arrested four sixth-form boys, and the whole school was buzzing with rumours and speculations about this extraordinary event. Naturally, everybody was excited by the questions: Why? What for? However, at first nobody could say anything definite. Several days went by before the veil was lifted a little on the mysterious occurrence, and a week later the whole picture in all its detail became clear. It was a hideous picture and revolting to the last degree.

Following in the steps of our tradition, the boys of the sixth form, as we had done two years before, had formed a small circle, at which they read and discussed Pisarev, Dobroliubov, and other leaders of radical Russian public opinion. There were no more than seven or eight boys in it. They met usually once a week, and the leader of the circle was a capable fifteen-year-old boy named Amosov, the son of a municipal doctor at Omsk. Among the members of the circle there was a certain Kandaurov, whose father was a priest in a village near the town. Kandaurov was a highly-strung, emotional boy, who was perpetually seeking for the 'truth of life' and was known for his pronounced religious bent. How he came to be in the circle I do not know, but the result was tragic.

Holy week came, and all the schoolboys went to confession according to custom. At confession our new priest Father Dionisy, whom I had disliked from the very first moment of his appearance in Omsk, asked Kandaurov to confess his sins. Pious Kandaurov decided to open his heart to his spiritual adviser and told him about his seekings and doubts. Father Dionisy instantly realized that here was something he could use to his own advantage. Adroitly questioning the naïve and unsuspecting boy, the priest gradually extracted from him all the facts about the circle—its membership, its meetings, readings, and discussions. Moreover, wishing to loosen Kandaurov's tongue as much as possible, Father Dionisy intimated that he was not unfamiliar with these thorny questions and sympathized with the seekings of the growing youth. Then he absolved Kandaurov, and on parting gave him a firm and friendly handshake.

As soon as Father Dionisy had finished his confessional duties, he at once hurried off to the Chief of Police and gave him all the information he had obtained from Kandaurov. The Chief of Police was no longer lazy old Rozov, but a bold, loud-voiced Colonel Petrayev, who, threatening an invisible foe with his enormous hairy fist, liked to exclaim: "There won't be any sedition in the district I'm in charge of! I won't tolerate such a disgrace!"

Petrayev immediately took action in the 'affair of the criminal circle of high-school boys', and four of the pupils—with Amosov at their head—were arrested. They were kept in prison a couple of weeks and then let out on their parents' bail. However, they were not allowed to stay on at the grammar school and soon afterwards disappeared from Omsk.

The whole affair, the details of which soon became widely known, created a great sensation in the town. The schoolboys were greatly excited and expressed their attitude towards the hero of this outrageous business by all the means available to them. He was immediately nicknamed 'The Nark', and during the night some 'unknown persons' pelted the windows of his home with stones. The few schoolboys who had retained any religious feelings were particularly shocked. I remember one seventh-form boy who talked the matter over with me almost cried and kept exclaiming: "How is it possible? . . . Confession! . . . A man opens his heart before God. . . . And all of a sudden the police appear! . . . How is it possible? . . . If God tolerates such things, then He isn't God, or He doesn't exist at all!"

I had no reason to come forward as God's advocate, and advised my friend to read Byron's *Cain*.

Father Dionisy's espionage had the immediate result of confirming me in my attitude. All compromise with life, school, the clergy, and the Tsarist régime became impossible. The sweet thoughts of beauty, love, enjoyment, and a happy existence were dispersed like smoke. I again returned to the world of reality, temporarily eclipsed by the pleasantness of my association with the Korolevs. I was once more full of wrath and hatred for the baseness of the Russian régime, and came back again to the accursed question which was still unsolved for me: what to do next?

One day during this period I was returning with Natasha from the River Om, where we had been skating together, and being still under the impression produced by Father Dionisy's conduct, I told her about my theory of the purification of the world by fire. Natasha listened to me attentively, with her head slightly bent to one side. I could not see her face, and did not know how she reacted to my ideas. All of a sudden she stopped so abruptly that the snow crunched under her feet, and in a peculiar voice she asked. "And you seriously believe in your theory, Vanya?"

I hesitated for a moment and then answered: "The theory seems to me beautiful and strong. And, besides, I can't see any other way . . ."

We walked a few more paces along the street, and I added rather undecidedly: "I'm like a heathen with my theories. . . You know, a heathen often beats and smashes his god if it doesn't bring him happiness. . . I also easily throw my theories over if I'm convinced they are bad."

"Well then, Vanya," Natasha replied warmly, "I advise you to throw that theory of yours over as quickly as you can. It's no good at all."

"Why not?" I objected.

"Have you read political economy?" Natasha asked.

"No, I haven't," I said.

"That's obvious," she remarked. Then she added: "You must get to know political economy without fail."

My conversation with Natasha sank into my mind. I began to look for people who could help me to find out more about this mysterious 'political economy', especially among the 'exiled students'. But here I was doomed to be greatly disappointed.

The revolutionary students of that period were a motley and rather foolish conglomeration of people from various social groups, with various attitudes and various political sympathies. Of course, among them there were adherents of this or that political trend (in particular Social-Democrats), but these were few. I never met one of them among the exiled students in Omsk. The overwhelming majority of the young people of those days had no purposive world-outlook, but there was a good deal of mental confusion and muddle. One often came across people who had 'leanings' towards the Social-Democrats or the Social-Revolutionaries, and also radical-minded individuals with strong leanings towards anarchism. The only thing that united all the students was the urge to protest against the Tsarist autocracy. They were all prepared to hold meetings, organize strikes and go to demonstrations, but only a few of them could give a clear and precise answer to the question which was worrying me: what to do next?

It is not surprising in these circumstances that although all the exiled students liked to talk 'political economy' in and out of season, scarcely any of them had a clear, well-reasoned idea of it. Nor is it surprising that neither Korolev, nor Baranov, nor Palchik, to whom I appealed, was able to give me any particular help towards studying this special science, which seemed to me at the time to be the key to the

knowledge of 'good and evil' on earth. Natasha was better grounded than the others in this subject in which I was interested, and it was to her that I appealed most frequently for help, but even she was unable to satisfy me completely.

Anyway, I set about my studies. The first book I managed to get hold of was Charles Gide's *Political Economy*. I spent many long hours reading it and trying to penetrate the mysteries of its author's bourgeois mode of thinking, but I did not feel any enthusiasm. Of course, I was not then in the position to make any critical approach to Gide's theories, but there was something in his book which I did not like. Some instinct told me that it was not what I was looking for. My reading of Gide, however, had one positive result: I realized immediately that there was one sphere of enormous importance—economics—which I had hitherto neglected altogether owing to my enthusiasm for various 'humanitarian' theories and problems.

Shortly after this, Tasia gave me a lithographed copy of Kliuchevsky's *Course of Russian History*. This remarkable work made a great impression on me—not only because of its unusual clarity and brilliance of exposition, but also because it repeatedly stressed the rôle of economic factors in the development of the Russian State. Kliuchevsky's work still further confirmed me in my realization of the fact that economics were of extreme importance and should be studied, and that one should be able to draw the right conclusions from them. But how was I to do this? At that time I was like a man standing in front of a coffer in which the greatest treasures are concealed. He wants to open it, but does not know where the key is, and rummages in all the nooks and corners in search of it, feeling sure that it is somewhere about.

A chance happening did me a very good turn. One day Tasia introduced me to the new teacher of history at the girls' high school, who had recently arrived from the south of Russia. Tokmakov—that was his name—had not long left the university and had not yet had time to sink into the bog of commonplace life. He was attached to the legal Marxist movement, was comparatively well-read and was good at explaining intricate problems. I became friends with Tokmakov and spent the evenings with him fairly often, when we discussed social questions. One day he gave me Albert Lang's book, *The Workers' Question*, which was popular in radical circles in those days. I liked it very much, and somehow it linked up in my mind with Spielhagen's memorable novel, *No Man Fights Alone*.

"You were right, Natasha. One must know political economy," I exclaimed warmly at the Korolievs' tea-table a couple of months after my first conversation with Natasha on this subject.

Natasha nodded her head with a look of satisfaction, and I went on: "Political economy is the most vital and the most necessary science. It has grown out of life itself. It is brimming over with the blood of social questions."

"What does that mean, 'brimming over with the blood of social questions'?" Natasha asked with slight amusement. "You're too fond of using far-fetched expressions, Vanya. Speak more plainly."

"Very well!" I replied, imitating Natasha's tone. "Don't blame me for being far-fetched—it's poetry that's spoiling me."

"A sin confessed is as good as forgiven," Natasha said, laughingly. "What conclusions have you arrived at since you've made the acquaintance of political economy?"

"I'll answer you like Socrates: I only know that I know nothing," I retorted; and then added in a more serious tone: "Lately I've been pondering on the nature of morality."

"What is it then?" Natasha asked, interested.

"You see, Natasha, it seems to me that everything that promotes the cause of progress is moral, and everything that impedes it is immoral."

Natasha reflected for a while. Then she shook her head and said: "Perhaps you're right. . . . Only. . . . Only what is progress?"

Now it was my turn to reflect. Natasha's question pierced me like an arrow, and my theory was shaken to its foundations. I was unable to give a clear answer to the question: what is progress? And for this reason I somehow began to feel I was not up to the mark.

"You know, Natasha," I suddenly began in a friendly, warm tone, as when we were at Zakhlamino, "I don't know what's coming over me. Sometimes I feel I've got tremendous powers in me, at other times I feel I'm an insignificant fly. . . . At times I feel a wild surge of faith in myself; at others a hopeless sadness and despair. . . . Why should that be? . . . I'm fed up with this damned, dead Omsk! I want real, seething life! . . ."

Natasha gently touched my hand and said in the tone of an elder sister with experience of life: "You'll soon have a seething life, Vanya. All this will pass."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Last Days at School

AND NOW AT last came the long-awaited day, which it had seemed to me would never come: I finished school.

But it was no easy matter for me. I had previously to go through the 'gates of hell': the excitements and torments of the final examinations. I looked forward to them with fear and anxiety. During the whole course at the high school I had worked well. True, I was hardly ever top of my form—more swotting was required for this in those days than I could manage—but my name usually figured in the first five. I made up for my dislike of swotting by general development, mental versatility, a good memory and a knowledge of literature, and as a result I floated more or less successfully on the waters of the required

scholarship. But now on the eve of the final examinations, as I summed up my nine years of study, I was only too well aware of the incompleteness of my knowledge of the subjects which were obligatory for everyone finishing a secondary school. And this troubled and disturbed me.

"Well, how are you feeling?" Mikhail Marcovich asked me before the first examination.

"How am I feeling?" I answered. "I feel like a horse at the races, that has got to jump over a dozen hurdles."

"Anyway, do you believe you'll get through?" Mikhail persisted.

"What do you mean by 'believe'?" I retorted. "And what is 'belief' in general?" Filaret's Catechism has this definition: 'Faith is the essence of things unseen, that is, belief in the invisible as in the visible, in the desired and desirable as in the actual.' Not a bad definition! In that sense I suppose I 'believe', but I rely chiefly on my versatility, and also on my luck, which has helped me out quite well so far. But I'm no more prepared for the exams than the devil."

Then the examinations began. They lasted a whole month. During the whole of that time we finalists did not live, but burned: we slept badly, ate badly, swotted like blazes and were in a state of constant agitation. My luck did not desert me and I did not lose my head. The examinations started off quite well. They opened with an essay on a literary subject "Why did Russian literature begin to lose its ecclesiastical character from the time of Peter the Great?" All the boys in our form made a fairly good job of this essay, and Petrov was so pleased that he drank to celebrate, and in a state of intoxication said that he had given me a five-plus and would 'smother me with kisses' into the bargain. I also got a five for algebra and geometry in the written examination. I was terrified of the oral examination in mathematics, but my luck came to the rescue and I drew easy questions. As a result I got a five for this as well. In general, things went off very well and, as I wrote to Birdie, "the gentle countenance of the gold medal is beginning to appear before me in a blue haze". Yes, things went off well, so well indeed that my head began to feel dizzy with success. . .

The spring that year happened to be late and cold. Till the end of April there was a thick, strong layer of ice on the Irtysh. It did not begin to break up till the first days of May, and even then the drift developed slowly and unevenly. After mathematics came the examination in history. Usually I worked for the examinations with one of my friends, mostly with Marcovich—either at my house or his. That day I went to Marcovich's house to read up history. We sat down at the table and spread out the books. But somehow I couldn't sit still. I got up and went over to the window of the room which looked out right on to the Irtysh. The grand scene instantly enthralled me. The wide river was raging and swirling. Huge ice-floes were being carried along by the current swollen with the mighty spring floods. The ice-floes moved in an almost solid mass, leaping on one another, colliding and breaking, now forming solid dams, now opening up stretches of clear water. The wind whistled over the swollen river, and foamy waves swept over the open spaces. Some vague, but irresistibly powerful

feeling suddenly awoke in me, and turning to Mikhail, I exclaimed: "Mishka, chuck the books. Let's go out in a boat!"

Mikhail looked up from his text-book with an astonished expression.

"Have you gone mad?" he exclaimed, almost horrified.

But my demon was aroused, and I knew that I would have my way. In vain Mikhail pleaded the necessity of preparing for the examination and pointed out the madness of going out in a boat in the drifting ice. I stood my ground, persuading, threatening, entreating him and trying to play on his self-esteem, and in the end I got my way.

"All right, blast you, let's go!" Mikhail said finally.

We no sooner got outside the house than we were caught in a cold, piercing wind. On the river bank we met a couple of boatmen, who when they heard what we meant to do, looked at us as though we were lunatics. However, I insisted, and shrugging their shoulders they let us have our own way. We got into a little rowing-boat and set out. Our intention was to thread our way through the open spaces and rifts among the ice-floes to the other bank and then return. We reckoned the whole business would take two or three hours, and we would be back in time for dinner, after which we would go on with the study of Illovaisky. We did not forget that we had a history examination hanging threateningly over our heads!

Alas for our expectations! We had hardly rowed out a few yards from the bank when we were trapped in a solid mass of ice and carried away by the swift current. We struggled hard to release ourselves from this cold embrace. We rocked the boat and tried to push the ice-floes away with the oars so as to clear a narrow strip of open water for ourselves, but it was all in vain. Then we decided on a desperate step: we jumped on to a big ice-floe that was pressing against the stern of our boat, and then hauled our frail boat on to it. Then, exerting all our strength, we dragged the boat across the ice-floes to the opposite edge where a stretch of open water began. The ice-floe rocked and trembled under our weight, and in one place it cracked just after we had got over the dangerous spot. However, our efforts were crowned with success and we managed to reach the open water. But here, too, we encountered further difficulties. The wind whistled in our ears, and the foaming waves swamped the boat. I had difficulty in rowing against the boisterous wind, and Mikhail took turns at steering and baling the water out of the stern. At last we came to the end of the open stretch. Further on was a broad field of ice, but it was not so compact as under the high bank from which we had rowed. The ice-floes were smaller and the gaps between them more frequent, so that it was easier for us to get along. However, the wind continued to rage and the foaming waves with lumps of ice beat ominously against the sides of the little boat. We worked with all our might. Wet, hot and intoxicated with the danger and the furious effort to overcome it, we struggled with all our strength against the wild elements. I felt extraordinarily elated. I was not in the least afraid. I was firmly convinced that nothing would happen to us. I also realized with all my being that to overcome the danger I must exert all my strength, energy and will. I did this, or rather, it somehow did itself, and at the same time I was filled

with an indescribable ecstasy. Joyfully I raised my face to the wind, the cold spray and the stinging particles of ice. I was unable to restrain my feelings and frequently shouted out at the top of my voice: "Over to the left! Harder! Press on it! Don't let it go!"

My shouts were often quite senseless, but they expressed the joyful frenzy with which my whole being was filled. And Mikhail understood me perfectly.

At ordinary times you could cross the Irtysh in a boat in fifteen to twenty minutes. Now it took us three whole hours to get across to the opposite bank. When at last, tired and soaked to the skin, we set foot on land, it was already past our dinner time. We were terribly hungry, but that did not worry us. Nor did it worry us to know that to get back home we must once again go through all the dangers and trials we had just experienced. We were worried by something quite different. To-morrow there was to be an examination in history, and it was obvious there would be no time for us to taste of the great wisdom of Mr. Illovaisky. What were we to do?

There was nothing to be done. The bank on that side of the Irtysh was inhospitable and deserted. In order to loosen our limbs a little and to warm ourselves up, we ran up and down the slopes and did a little friendly sparring. Then we decided there was no time to lose and set out on the return journey. Once again we faced the wind, the waves and the swiftly moving, noisily colliding ice-floes. Again we drifted, shouted, rowed, baled out the water and made our way through the barriers of ice. And at last, after incredible exertions, anxieties, and struggles we reached the Omsk bank, but five miles below the town. The evening was drawing on. We left the boat and went home on foot through the Zagorodnaya wood. When we approached Marcovich's house the lights were already beginning to shine in the windows. We went in at the back door in order not to attract attention and made our way to Mikhail's room and asked on the quiet for his sister Lenochka. The girl's kind face had an almost horrified expression when she saw us: we were covered in mud and sand, and water was trickling from our clothes on to the floor.

"Where have you been to? What has happened to you?" she anxiously exclaimed.

"Don't say a word to our parents, please!" said Mikhail sternly.

And when Lenochka vowed on her word of honour that she would be as dumb as the grave, we told her all about our adventure.

After that there was a mysterious bustle in the house. Lenochka ran to and fro, bringing us dressing-gowns and dry under-clothing, supper and strong tea. She had a firm conviction that strong tea was the best protection against sickness.

When I was going home, Mikhail groaned mournfully: "But what about Illovaisky? . . . I've got a feeling I'm going to fail to-morrow."

But I was intoxicated with my examination successes, so I light-heartedly waved the idea aside: "Fiddlesticks! . . . Exams? . . . Tommy rot! Our luck will see us through!"

This time I turned out to be right. Next day both I and Marcovich,

in spite of our being completely unprepared, passed the history exam. quite well.

The remaining examinations also went off successfully. I was most afraid of the Greek paper and certainly the question I drew, which was to translate a passage from Sophocles, presented fairly serious linguistic difficulties for me. Then I had recourse to a method I had tried before: during the twenty minutes allowed to each candidate for preparation, I wrote out in iambic pentameters the approximate meaning of the passage (as far as I understood the text) and as a result I got a five, plus commendation for my 'poetic talent'.

And now at last the unforgettable day arrived. On 1st June, 1901, I finished school!

Two days later the final results of the examinations were announced. All the pupils of the eighth form passed out successfully, and gold medals were awarded to me and Usov. And not only medals! Each of us was given a copy of the *Journey to the East* of Nicholas II when he was heir to the throne—three enormous volumes in a luxurious binding, with a flattering text and magnificent illustrations. This prize was so heavy that I had to hire a cab to get it home after the ceremony at the school.

For the last time I went round the class-rooms and the school building. What a host of experiences, thoughts, and feelings I had known within those gloomy, inhospitable walls! How many new ideas, thrilling hopes, and ardent dreams! . . . A feeling of sadness came over me. I could not help recalling the final words of the *Prisoner of Chillon*:

*So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are—even I
Regain'd my freedom with a sigh.*

However, it was only for a moment. On the following morning all the boys who had finished school gathered on the principal bridge across the Om for the traditional ceremony: at a given signal the ex-pupils of the eighth form tore the silver badges off their school caps and threw them into the water with shouts and cheers. The townsfolk, who came running up at this unusual spectacle, laughed loudly and made approving remarks.

Two days later Marcovich came to me and said: "I've got a suggestion, Ivan. They've sent a boat along from our farm. . . . Let's get up a party and go to the farm by river . . ."

"Splendid!" I said enthusiastically.

The same evening a youthful, jolly party consisting of the Marcoviches, their cousin Kolchanovsky, myself, Kovalev, Marinovsky, and a few others—ten in all—set out from Omsk in a big, heavily-laden boat. We had to go downstream for more than a hundred versts, and we not only took with us the necessary amount of provisions, but also our overcoats, and blankets and pillows for the night.

It was a perfectly wonderful trip. To this very day it lives in my memory as one of the brightest impressions of my youth. And it is not surprising! For all of us it was the dawn of life. We had all just finished school and felt like birds let out of a cage. We were all very young and

naïve, and the future was painted for us in glowing colours. It appeared to us like a broad, beautiful avenue, along which we would now go calmly and confidently towards the successes and victories awaiting us. We were all full of the mood of freedom, joy, and the thrilling expectation of something interesting and remarkable that was to happen to each of us. We simply walked on air, gazing eagerly into the hazy outlines of the future.

Here once more was the broad, mighty river blazing with the rays of the setting sun; here were boundless steppes peacefully gliding past us with the occasional dark patches of distant forests; here above was the glowing sky in which silver stars were already beginning to twinkle; and that invigorating, slightly intoxicating air, filled with the moisture of the river and the sap of the Siberian earth. Certainly, we felt like happy demi-gods! . . .

Mikhail, sitting thoughtfully at the rudder, looked at me and said: "Recite some poetry. . . . It's so wonderful, that you feel you simply can't talk in ordinary language."

"That's right," said the others. "Recite something good. . . . Something that goes right to the heart."

I was in a poetic mood myself, so I consented with no more ado.

"What shall I recite?" I asked, thinking aloud more than actually expecting a reply.

"Recite something of your own," Kolchanovsky suggested.

"My own?" I repeated rather undecidedly.

I was not giving myself airs. I merely thought that my verses would be too weak and crude in face of this wonderful nocturnal scene. But the whole party insisted and I had to agree. I decided to recite a song which I had written only a couple of days before, and with a voice slightly tremulous with emotion I began:

*To the far-away sun! To the wide, open sea!
With silver waves foaming around!
We'll sing freedom's song in the wide open space,
Let the song of the workers resound!*

*We've hoisted our banner and sailed away boldly . . .
From out of the darkness and dread
To where the bright dawn reddens o'er the abyss
Our shelterless path leads ahead.*

*The wind's in our sail, and the shore of our sorrows
Is hid in a mist from our eyes,—
Now only the roars of the storm lie before us,
The waves and the clouds of the skies.*

*To the far-away sun! Brothers, come, let us vow
We'll keep to our path till the end!
And vow to get rid of the sufferings and strife,
And the evils of life to amend!*

*Come, vow you will fight the dark storm of foul weather
And fog in the cold midnight air.
Take a vow, O my brothers! We're children of freedom,
We're fighters for those who despair!*

*But hark! there's the thunder! . . . Now surges the sea . . .
The clouds come in threatening array . . .
The hurricane roars o'er the wide open space . . .
It's the storm! It's the storm on its way!*

*So, brothers, stand firm! In the fog of foul weather
Row on till the battle is won.
We've hoisted our banner and with a free song
We're set for the far-away sun!"*

Perhaps because this song which spoke of a ship, freedom, and the sun was in complete harmony with our mood and circumstances, my recitation was a great success. Marinovsky, who had musical talent, resolved to set it to music immediately, and twenty minutes later the whole boat was singing my song in chorus to the tune he had improvised. The result was not very harmonious, but it went with a swing, and its rhythm kept time with the strokes of the oars. It seemed as though our boat was really making for the 'far away sun' along the broad path of water glowing with the purple of the sunset. . . .

When night came down, we put in at a small, deserted island and pitched our camp. We kindled a fire, boiled some fish soup and roasted slices of mutton on skewers. Then we drank tea and sang songs—old Russian folk-songs. Kovalev danced the *kamarinskaya*, and Marinovsky performed the *lezginka*. It was all very merry and high spirited. Then when everyone was getting tired and calmed down, we talked together quietly. We talked about what was uppermost in the minds of all of us—our future. We spoke of our hopes and shared our plans and intentions. Both the Marcovich brothers were going to Tomsk—the elder to study law and the younger medicine. Marinovsky was going to Kazan to study mathematics and physics. Kovalev was still uncertain as to whether he wanted to be a doctor or an engineer.

Midnight was drawing near. We did not want to remain on the island till the morning, and decided to go on all night. The camp-fire went out, and all the food had been eaten. We got into the boat again and set off. We kept watch in turns. There was no need to row, as we were drifting downstream and the strong current carried us irresistibly away into the distance over the dark, mysterious surface of the river, in which the far-off sky was reflected so tremulously and enigmatically with its myriads of quietly twinkling stars.

My turn to watch came towards the end of the night. I sat at the rudder in the stern, with a fixed gaze trying to penetrate the surrounding darkness and listening attentively to every sound, to every cry of a bird from the distant bank and to every splash of the water under the keel. The fantastic outlines of bushes, trees, island, and the steep banks glided past in the darkness. Once a steamer, ablaze with lights, came towards

us and passed by. For a moment it filled the wide space of the river with the noise and the clatter of its paddle-wheels. The next moment, like some strange fantastic apparition it passed round the bend and vanished into the night. Darkness and silence once again possessed the world. It was uncanny yet pleasant. Quiet thoughts crept slowly and lazily through my drowsy head.

Then the black darkness began to turn to grey. The first streaks of dawn shot up. In the east a cluster of downy clouds began to glow. An enormous red sun crept slowly up from below the horizon. A strong cold wind blew up. I roused the elder Marcovich, and with the aid of a couple of oars and a blanket we rigged up a primitive sail, which carried us swiftly along. By seven o'clock the whole crew was awake—cheerful, hungry, and noisy. At one of the villages on the way we bought some freshly-caught fish, and a few versts farther down we put in at a small deserted island. Here we bathed, basked on the sand, wrestled and shouted, and then we ate fish soup and drank tea. Then we set off down the river again. Once again there was the sun, the blue sky, the fields and forests and the fresh, invigorating Siberian air. So it continued the whole day long. Towards evening we at last drew near our destination. When we caught sight of the roofs and chimneys of the farm we all lined up 'in parade order' on the boat. And when our 'ship' turned in towards the quay, we 'saluted' the farm people congregated on the bank with a terrifying volley from a shot-gun and a couple of revolvers.

The three days we spent at the farm passed as in a mist. All the numerous Marcovich family were already there together with a whole batch of relations, dependants, and hangers-on. The house was full of merry young girls. The whole party went for rambles in the forest, amused ourselves dancing in a ring, sang songs and went boating. Couples soon paired off, and the whole atmosphere became charged with the pleasant excitement of carefree, youthful flirtation. Everybody was very gay, joking, laughing and chaffing each other. Now and again there were outbursts of hearty, wholesome laughter. Marinovsky, who had a good memory, amused the public with absurd quotations from the works of various obscure poets. Assuming a melancholy pose, gazing sadly in front of him and with a despairing gesture of the hands, he suddenly proclaimed:

*"Our life passes by in a spasm of fear,
With temperature zero Life's brittle.
And we crawl about in it, aimless and blind,
Sideways and little by little."*

Everybody held their sides and laughed uproariously. Or else he would recite extracts from the 'Siberian poetess' Dreving, who had recently published a 'solid volume' of her works.

*"A copse outside the window,
A nightingale there sat,
What could be more simple
Or lovelier than that?"*

At the same time Marinovsky put on an incredibly idiotic expression, and everybody again roared with laughter.

Or pretending to introduce me to the farm people, he would call out in an absurdly portentous voice: "Allow me to introduce to you a citizen of the universe, the son of Father Sun-god and Mother Earth, the betrothed bridegroom of her majesty the Revolution! . . ."

"Shut up, you fool!" I shouted.

And everybody standing by burst out laughing and loudly clapped us both.

So with laughter, gaiety, joyous hopes and rapturous expectations our young party passed the time at the farm, and then returned to Omsk, this time going by horse.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

My Last Summer at Home

MY FAMILY WERE again spending the summer at the Military Sanatorium. This time the Tchemodanovs did not come to us. We were by ourselves, and now peace and quiet reigned between my parents and myself. My mother was now definitely convinced that I was already grown up and could stand on my own feet. I was seventeen and a half. I had finished the high school and in two months was to leave for St. Petersburg where I would lead the independent life of a student. . . . This had its effect. And besides that, we were faced with the prospect of a long separation in the near future, and neither my mother nor myself wanted to poison the last few weeks of our life together with quarrels and conflicts. And for this reason we lived in a friendly, amiable and even affectionate way. This was very pleasant to me, and I was in a very good mood all the time.

There were also other reasons. Since the time when I was in the sixth form I had firmly resolved to enter the University of St. Petersburg, and my determination increased as time went by. Why did I desire so passionately to go to St. Petersburg? My motives were two-fold.

Firstly, I longed for a literary career. I had no clear idea as to what exactly I was going to be—a journalist, a literary critic, a novelist or a poet. But that I was born to be a writer I had not the slightest doubt. And the literary capital was, of course, St. Petersburg.

Secondly, I longed also to take part in the wide social-political movement against Tsarism, which was spreading with increasing strength throughout the country at that time, and of which a faint echo had reached even our remote town of Omsk. How this participation was to take place, in what forms and on what basis, was likewise not quite clear to me. But I had a burning aspiration to take part in it and this grew stronger and stronger as I drew near to the end of my schooldays. I was firmly convinced that I had only to get to St. Petersburg and all

my doubts and difficulties would be resolved. the gates of truth would open in front of me of their own accord. Hence the irrepressible attraction of the capital for me. It did not matter to me in the least in what capacity I got there—the main thing was to get there All the rest seemed to me quite simple. Like Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, I kept repeating all the time: "To St. Petersburg! To St. Petersburg! To St. Petersburg!" But unlike Chekhov's heroines I not only dreamed about St. Petersburg—I firmly resolved to get there at all costs, and I did.

However, I did not get what I wanted all at once or without a struggle. My parents did not object, but obstacles were put in my way by the Tsarist Government. In its feverish struggle against the growing revolutionary movement in those days, the Ministry of Popular Education had recourse, among other things, to the peculiar idea of dividing the whole of Russia into a series of large 'university regions', while all the secondary schools of each district were attached to the higher educational institutions of their respective regions. On finishing the high schools or the 'non-classical' schools, the pupils were obliged to enter the university or technical institute of their own region and were not allowed to enter those of other regions. The purpose of this measure was to prevent the concentration of large masses of young students in the capitals, where they were becoming an increasingly serious revolutionary political force. In these circumstances, therefore, I was bound to continue my studies at Tomsk or at Kazan (as the Tomsk university in those days still had not all the faculties, the doors of the Kazan university were also open to students from Omsk). This did not suit me in the least. In order to overcome the obstacle, I thought at one time of transferring to Moscow on finishing the seventh form, and completing my secondary education there. For various reasons, however, this plan could not be carried out. Then I hit on another idea. In those days the faculty of history and philology was considered a poor affair, as it stuffed the students with ancient languages and had nothing to offer the graduates other than the prospect of a humble career as secondary school teachers. This faculty was not very popular, and it was mainly the failures who entered it. It rarely had its full complement of students, and there were plenty of vacancies. I was aware of all this, and decided to try my luck. I sent in a request to the faculty of history and philology in the University of St. Petersburg, and on the strength of my gold medal begged to be admitted 'as an exception'. My calculation was correct. Gold medallists were not knocking at the doors of the faculty of history and philology every day—and at the end of June I received a communication informing me that I would be entered as a student of the metropolitan university. I was delighted: so my dream was realized—I was going to St. Petersburg!

The preparations for my departure began. My mother herself made underclothing and tunics for me on a Singer sewing-machine. The bootmaker who had shod all our family for a good many years was given orders for new boots of a particularly hard-wearing kind. Makhotkin, 'Men's tailor for military and civilian gentlemen', who had also supplied us for many years, made me a student's grey jacket and a pair of dark green trousers. At Shanina's shop I bought a student's cap with a blue

band. And so I was fully rigged out. I was delighted with the new suit, especially when I put on, under the jacket, my dark blue Russian shirt smartly caught in at the waist with a narrow leather belt. Then I felt as grown-up, independent and brusque as a real student is expected to be. Gazing at me affectionately, my mother remarked "You know, Vanichka, student's uniform suits you". I also thought it suited me, and this was not displeasing to me. However, I considered it beneath my dignity to show interest in such things and contemptuously waved aside such 'feminine' compliments.

"What's the idea—it suits me? Uniform is the rule, so I've got to wear a uniform. There's nothing else to be done."

Soon Korolev and a few other students invited me to a meeting of the 'Society of Fellow-countrymen of Omsk', which was to consider the question of replenishing its mutual aid fund. In those days similar students' organizations on a territorial basis existed in all the university towns. They led a semi-legal existence and were chiefly concerned with giving financial and educational assistance to their members. As the majority of the members of the 'Society of Fellow-countrymen of Omsk' from St. Petersburg were then at Omsk itself, they decided to have a meeting to discuss their plan of work for the forthcoming winter. I was invited as a prospective member of this Society. I was tremendously flattered by the invitation and turned up at the meeting in my newly-made student's uniform. Natasha gave me a look of kindly amusement, as much as to say: 'Here comes Vanichka-Bantam-cock!' However, that didn't bother me in the least. I felt that the invitation I had received was an official recognition of my transition to the new status of an adult and a student.

At the beginning of July the Korolevs managed to sell their house at last and the whole family moved to St. Petersburg. After their mother's death there was nothing to keep them at Omsk, and they decided to cast anchor in the capital. I saw them off at the station and promised to look them up in the autumn as soon as I arrived in St. Petersburg. For a long time after their departure there was something lacking. I had become very friendly with Natasha, and though no element of love entered into our relationship, I missed her a great deal. When I was in the town I always contrived to go past the Korolevs' old house, which held so many memories for me, and once I even went up the creaking steps of the porch and somewhat hesitantly rang the bell. In answer to my ring, a fat woman with her skirts tucked up came out. She was the cook, and asked me what I wanted. On hearing that the owners (the new owners!) were not at home, I promptly made up a yarn about having spoken to them about renting a room, and under this pretext I asked her to let me go inside. She looked puzzled, but allowed me to go over the premises. I quickly went through all the familiar rooms, stopping for a moment beside the table which I knew so well and which stood in the same old place. I went up to the window through which I used to like to point out the stars to Natasha and Parochka, nearly upset a pile of plates in the kitchen from which I had so often carried the samovar into the dining-room, and then hurried out into the street. I came away feeling both sad and pleased.

The same evening I sent Natasha the following letter in verse:

*The cosy nest is scattered, for evermore forsaken . . .
The dear old home forgotten, the old porch tumbled down.
And boldly in the night, when all is peace around,
The past comes back and looks with sadness into my face
And in the twilight wander the restless shades of those
Who long have been asleep beneath the tomb's chill stone,
And plaintively the steps creak with their mouldering boards
And through the empty rooms there steals a rustling sound.
And sadness fills the heart, and loneliness strikes chill,
And thoughts fly back again to days that are no more,
And something weeps deep down within my aching heart,
And something in the twilight looms before my eyes . . .
The chilly day will come, and with a troubled wave
Life once again will stir within the abandoned walls,
And with a ruthless hand the newly entered lord
Will sweep away the dust of all that's gone before,
And in the empty rooms the tapping axe will sound
And everywhere the house will hum with noisy chatter,
And all the swarm of ghosts, uprisen from their graves
When all is peace at night, will swiftly fly away . . .
But still on this clear night, all bathed in silver moonlight,
The old house stands and dreams of the days beyond recall,
And the spirits of the past appear with friendly greeting,
And what has gone before returns to life again.
And in a noiseless throng the pale ghosts roam around
With silent haunting tread behind the orphaned door,
And quietly they whisper, with longings deep and sad,
Of happiness that was and days that are no more.*

The departure of the Korolevs led to my becoming closer friends with Olinger and Tanya. In spite of his determination to sit for the final examinations as an external pupil, Olinger never finished the high school. The authorities refused to admit him to the examinations on account of his 'unreliability'. This, however, had very little effect on Nikolai. He was now entirely taken up with his love for Tanya, which for him eclipsed the rest of the world. They always went about together, sighing, cooing, exchanging tender looks and kissing even in the presence of others. Although I was very friendly with Olinger, I felt I was one too many in their company. For this reason I had kept away from Nikolai as much as possible during the whole of the second half of the winter and the spring, and had spent my time more with the Korolevs. At the beginning of the summer, however, Olinger decided with his usual impulsiveness to marry Tanya in spite of the dissuasion and against the advice of his relations. On principle, he refused to go through any marriage ceremony. Nikolai and Tanya 'married unofficially' and settled in a flat. Nikolai's parents and Tanya's mother were panic-stricken. But he refused even to listen to any talk of regularizing their union. This boldness and resoluteness on his part raised him considerably in my

estimation, and I again began to visit him frequently at his home, the more so because after he had settled down with Tanya he had become better balanced, calmer, and light-hearted. He was once more able to see something besides his Tanya and to be interested in something besides Tanya's moods. The three of us often used to go walking and boating together; we talked, argued, and made plans for the future. The last summer I spent at Omsk was marked by particularly close relations with Olinger. . . .

Then we parted, never to meet again—at least not in the spirit, if in the flesh.

Soon after my departure for St. Petersburg the Oligers at last got married, and then disappeared from Omsk. For a time I lost sight of Nikolai. But 'Tarasov's tracks were discovered'. Olinger undoubtedly had literary talent—it may not have been of the highest order, but his writing was pleasant, sympathetic, and sincere. His temper was revolutionary, but he was lacking in real revolutionary grit and steadfastness. In the 1905 period he produced several splendid, inspiring works; but later, during the phase of confusion, when the rotten virus of the counter-revolution had infected literature, he was unable to keep to his former path. Impulsive, flamboyant, emotional, he did not like many others betray the fires of the revolution, but nevertheless he paid a certain tribute to the decadent mood of the Stolypin period.

I did not see Olinger again till the spring of 1917, on my return to Petrograd from abroad. He was then a well-known writer; he had a good flat in the centre of the capital and was still living with Tanya, who had become a 'literary lady'. Nikolai and I met as old boyhood friends, but it soon became obvious that we had no language in common. The same thing had happened to Olinger as to many representatives of the Left intelligentsia in those days. For a great number of years he had talked, thought, and dreamed about revolution, but when the revolution came he did not recognize it and was afraid of it. For the revolution did not come in the romantic robes in which he had always clothed it in his imagination, but in a ragged shirt, in a whirlwind and a fury, and with horny hands, dust, dirt, sweat, and blood. And like many others, he could not see beneath this grim exterior the truly great and beautiful element which the revolution brought with it. It seemed to him that a 'savage barbarian' had come on to the stage of history, who would destroy all human culture and fling Shakespeare and Tolstoy into the fire.

During the stormy events of those days I did not have the opportunity to meet Nikolai very often. Nevertheless, I did see him a few times. We understood each other less and less. In the summer of 1917 he 'fled' from revolutionary Petrograd to somewhere far away—either the Philippines or Tahiti—together with some strange and unnecessary expedition of the Ministry of Finance, sent to the Pacific Ocean to investigate some strange and unnecessary questions. Tanya, however, remained in Russia. Nikolai had intended to come home at the end of 1917, but it happened otherwise. The civil war and intervention at that time split up Russia into parts. The battle fronts and the frontiers became impassable. I do not know the details of his subsequent fate. I only

know that he died in Harbin in 1919 or 1920. He remains, in my memory, however, as one of the brightest images of my early youth.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I Find the Way

WHEN THE LAST bell sounded and the train, puffing and panting heavily, moved slowly away from the platform of the Omsk station, I realized poignantly that an entirely new phase of my life was beginning.

Behind me were the years of childhood, boyhood, and early youth. Behind me were my family, the high school, and the dead-alive Siberian town. Behind me lay all that world in which I had grown up and developed until now, which had held me firmly in its grasp and which had tried to put my actions, intentions, desires, and even thoughts into a strong frame. Now the train was carrying me swiftly away from all this past, and before my mental gaze there opened up prospects of the future, prospects of illimitable breadth, hazily beautiful and intensely interesting. No doubt it was a feeling of the sort that comes to a young ship's-boy, who till now has only sailed about some small bay in a cutter and is for the first time going on a sea voyage on an ocean liner.

During the whole journey from Omsk to Moscow, which I had already made more than once, I was in a kind of pleasant haze. I was in a good mood and showed exemplary consideration and politeness to my casual fellow-travellers in the compartment. Every day on the journey I sent rapturous post cards to my mother and Olinger. In Moscow I was met at the station by Birdie. All was not well in her family: her younger brother Gunya had been taken ill with scarlet fever a few days before. Birdie's mother had gone into quarantine and shut herself up with Gunya in a couple of isolated rooms. Aunt Julia and the other brother Misha had gone to an hotel for the time being. Birdie's father was away from home and so she and I were complete masters in the flat, and we led a gay, untidy Bohemian life.

Birdie was by now a quite grown-up, charming girl. She made a great impression on everybody with her liveliness, intelligence, wide reading, and practical good sense, and she was always surrounded by lots of interesting young people. But her heart still remained untouched, and her greatest interest was in the Sunday schools and the Prechistensky workers' courses. During the year since our last meeting, Birdie had become even more attached than before to the idea of 'the cultural movement', and this immediately led to ferocious arguments between us. I stayed about a week in Moscow and almost every day we had 'ideological battles'. However, we were now older, and as we knew and understood more we showed greater respect for each other's opinions, and for this reason our 'battles', unlike those in the past, were deeper, serious, and mature. They did not leave behind them a sense of bitterness and

irritation. On the contrary, our old friendship merely benefited by these arguments. We somehow became closer and more intelligible to each other.

Usually we rushed about the town from morning till evening. Birdie introduced me to her friends and acquaintances of both sexes, of whom she had a good many. We went to Neskuchny Sad, rowed on the Moscow River, went to the theatre and dined in shady little restaurants. We would return home late in the evening. Birdie made tea and got the supper, whilst I entertained her with recitations from Schiller, Heine, Byron, and my other literary favourites. After supper we made ourselves 'at home': I took off my student's jacket and paced up and down the room with the collar of my Russian shirt unbuttoned. Birdie put on one of her mother's things, a loose garment like a dressing-gown, and with her hair partly let down sat in a low arm-chair beside the stove. Then we began to talk and argue on 'serious subjects'. It was mostly about one and the same thing: what is to be done, and which way shall we turn?

"I agree with you on one point," I said to Birdie, "that the present system in Russia is no good. It must be changed. Very well. But how? . . . Now that's where we come to the parting of the ways. You want first of all to teach reading and writing to all Shchedrin's 'breechless boys', and only after that to change the system. But I don't believe in your method."

"But what do you believe in?" Birdie asked, with a touch of malice. "In the purification of the world by fire?"

I found it rather unpleasant to be reminded of my recent 'little god', who had now been thrown off his pedestal, and so I went over to the attack. "Your 'reading and writing' is of course a useful thing," I said, "but it's like the baggage train of an attacking army . . . I prefer to be in the front firing-line. I like that much better, and besides it's more important."

"What army are you talking about?" Birdie retorted. "What have you got in mind?"

"What army?" I repeated. "Don't you realize, Birdie, that there's some sort of wave rising in society? Don't you see how it's getting bigger and stronger every day? The sleepers are awakening. . . In two or three years' time the face of Russia will be completely changed. Russia is a great country, and the Russian people are a great people. Let them shout that we Russians have no capacity for world affairs. The time will come when the Russian people will prove the opposite . . ."

And then, getting more and more excited, I went on. "I'm happy to think that I shall be alive in that wonderful epoch when Russia will throw off the spirit of decrepitude and depression and will grow young and straighten her bent back. . . Perhaps I, too, may succeed in rendering some small service to my country and rouse at least one or two sleeping people! Don't think I'm giving myself airs, but I say quite seriously: I'm ready to give my blood and my life for my country!"

Birdie was silent for a while, and then said pensively: "I believe in your sincerity, but aren't you carried away by a fantasy of your own creation? Is it possible that the face of Russia will have changed in two

or three years' time? Somehow I can't believe it. Aren't you wasting your powers in trying to achieve the impossible? Would it not be better to preserve them?"

"I can't pack my powers up in barrels in case I may need them in the future," I objected heatedly. "If I have any powers, I want to spend them now for what I consider a useful purpose."

I went on arguing with Birdie a long time that evening, and although we were unable to arrive at full agreement, the original gulf between our views got narrower: my cousin now understood my temper better.

On another occasion we talked about marriage. Birdie rather vaguely hinted that she had several suitors and that she liked one of them very much.

"Are you thinking of getting married?" I asked teasingly.

Birdie suddenly blushed and said rather unconvincingly: "After all, one must get married some time or other."

I was terribly indignant and gave Birdie a piece of my mind. She had talked so much of doing good for the people, of going into the countryside, of becoming a school-teacher in Sakhalin—what would become of all this, if she got married?

"Marriage puts the heaviest and the most beautiful chains on a person," I said heatedly. "Chains which bind one and make one incapable of acts of daring and supreme self-sacrifice. A married person is done for, has already fallen out of the line and stands apart from life . . ."

At that time I was firmly attached to the theory that marriage and the revolutionary struggle were incompatible, and I ardently expounded it on every convenient occasion. But Birdie did not agree with me.

"Then how will the human race go on?" she asked.

Even I was somewhat perplexed by this question, but I at once found a way out of the difficulty: "I'm not talking of the mass of the people," I said, "but of the fighters for freedom. On joining the order of the 'knights of the spirit', one must take a vow of indifference and disregard for one's personal life, if I may use the expression. . . . The cause requires people who are ready to give their all! Vestals of freedom are needed!"

We again got into a heated argument and sat up till two o'clock in the morning. When we parted before going to bed, Birdie suddenly put the question to me point-blank: "You keep talking about 'the cause', 'freedom', 'struggle', 'attacking army', but what does it actually mean? I know my little business and my place: I teach reading and writing to the ragged urchins. But what are you going to do? Where is your place?"

Birdie's question stabbed me right in the heart. She had hit a weak spot in my intellectual armour. The years that had gone by since the time of my trip on the convict-arge had given a strong impetus to my social-political development. I hated Tsarism and played with ideas of destroying the autocratic system. I sympathized with the students' movement and read 'political economy' zealously; I liked to talk about Leo and the 'idea of a Fourth Estate', but in reality I had no clear sense of what I wanted, where I was going or in what

concrete forms I would satisfy my 'struggle for freedom'. Indeed, what ought I to do when I got to St. Petersburg? Study at the university? Write articles in *Russkoye Bogatstvo*? Organize students' strikes? Study history and 'political economy'? Compose passionate hymns in honour of the struggle for freedom? Grieve over the bitter lot of the peasant and the worker? What was that 'liberating army' which I liked to talk about so much? And what part must I play in it? . . . To all these questions I had no clear answer. And for this reason Birdie's words touched me on a sore point. I was somewhat confused. My self-confidence had been dealt a heavy blow.

Two days later, as I was passing a large bookshop in Petrovka Street, I stopped automatically by the window. Among other new publications on show, I particularly noticed a book of average size in a bright blue cover, on which was printed:

S. and B. Webb
 HISTORY
 of
 THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND
 translated from the English
 by
 Papern
 Published by F. S. Pavlenkov

The subject interested me, the appearance of the book was attractive. And although the names of the authors were quite unknown to me, I went into the shop, and after turning over some pages, I bought the book for one rouble twenty-five copecks. When I got home, I set about reading it at once. In spite of its apparent dryness the matter aroused my keenest interest. I sat up with the book till far into the night, hardly paying any attention that evening to Birdie. I spent the whole of the next day reading it. And when at last I came to the final page, I realized that something very important had happened in my mind, the full significance of which I was still unable to perceive. An amazing picture had been revealed to me—the picture of two centuries of the workers' movement with its successes and defeats, its prejudices and ideals, its conflicts and organizations—a movement leading the masses of the workers ever forward and higher with a slow, firm step. At that time I was still unable, of course, to understand the specific conditions of English trade-unionism, or the 'Fabian' tendencies of the authors of the book—all this came later—but the book itself made a most profound impression on me. Until then I had heard and read something about the 'workers' question'—in Spielhagen's novel, in the works on political economy which I got at Omsk, in the works of Albert Lang and so on, but all this was brief, scrappy, and abstract. I had now seen for the first time an entire, broad canvas, loaded with facts and data, a canvas portraying in vivid colours the age-long struggle of the proletariat of one of the greatest countries of the world. It gripped me with extraordinary force.

Moreover, the book of 'S. and B. Webb' produced in my mind a

whirlwind of new ideas, sentiments, and anticipations. It seemed to me that the contents of the book had a very close connection with the question that was worrying me: what is to be done? I was still unable to say precisely in what the connection consisted, but I felt instinctively that it was there and that I ought to think the matter over thoroughly.

Many years later, when I was Ambassador in London, I made the personal acquaintance of 'S. and B. Webb', who were then very old, and one day I told them of the impression which their book had made on me in the dawn of my youth. They were pleased and at the same time surprised. When the Webbs wrote their book, they had no conception what intellectual dynamite that 'Fabian' work might become in the hands of a young Russian student. But in this case it revealed the character of the epoch through which Russia was then passing: only four years separated it from the first Russian revolution.

I had a long talk with Birdie about the Webbs' book. I told her enthusiastically what the book was about and painted a vivid picture of the struggles and successes of the British proletariat. After listening to me, Birdie said with a faint sigh: "Yes, but all that is in England. . ."

Then I remembered that when I was still at Omsk I had occasionally heard something from the 'exiled students' about the strikes and unrest in our factories. They usually talked about this in a whisper and with a mysterious air as though it were a great secret, although I was always left with the impression that they themselves had only a vague idea of such matters. I asked Birdie, as an 'inhabitant of the capital', whether she knew anything about the lives and struggle of the Russian workers. Being a supporter of 'the cultural movement', she had kept aloof from the revolutionary movement of those days, but nevertheless she told me some interesting things. Recently three workers who attended the Prechistensky courses where Birdie worked had been arrested there. Nobody could say precisely what the reasons for the arrests were, but at the workers' course there was whispered talk of 'circles', who were meeting either in a forest outside the city or in the crypt of one of the Moscow churches. Birdie also mentioned that a few months earlier one of her girl pupils in the Sunday school once brought to the class a lithographed sheet of paper. She was only semi-literate and asked Birdie to read the contents of the paper to her. It was a manifesto to the workers, appealing to them to fight for better working conditions, a shorter working day and increases of wages. Who had issued the manifesto Birdie did not know, but the sense of it she remembered very well.

When I went to bed that night, my head was in a whirl. The history of the English trade unions somehow got strangely interwoven and mixed up with what Birdie had told me, and still more with what my imagination pictured. For long I could not fall asleep, and felt in my consciousness, or rather in my sub-consciousness, some deep, intense, feverish work was going on. The human psyche—at least as I had observed it in myself once—usually functions on two 'storeys': the conscious and the subconscious. The one supplements the other. Often a process of thought begins on the conscious 'storey'; at a certain stage of development it is interrupted here, passes to the subconscious 'storey',

goes imperceptibly through a series of stages there, and lastly, it somehow unexpectedly ends up again in the conscious 'storey' as a clearly formulated deduction, which by no means flowed from the first half of the process which took place on that 'storey'. It was precisely such a condition that I experienced at the moment described.

Next evening I was to leave Moscow for St. Petersburg. In the morning Birdie and I went shopping to complete the outfit needed for a 'student's life' in the capital. We bought a belt, a dozen handkerchiefs, a razor with various accessories (which, however, I scarcely ever used), a note-book, a brief-case, and some other trifles.

But the principal acquisition of the day was a watch—the first watch I had owned in my life. I bought it at Bure's well-known shop for ten roubles, including the plain black cord which went round the neck. The watch was a big nickel 'turnip'. As I looked at it, I felt myself to be grown-up indeed. In the course of the next thirty years this watch was my faithful companion in all the complicated wanderings of my life. It was with me everywhere: in prison and exile, in the 'underground' life of the revolutionaries and in the emigration, in the working-class quarters of London and in the steppes of Mongolia, at meetings in the Revolution and at royal receptions in Europe and Asia. It went well and never let me down. I got used to it and grew attached to it. It was as though it had become part of myself. It was only in 1931, when I was plenipotentiary in Finland, that my faithful watch began to play tricks: even its strong steel organism was worn out. I had to get a new one—this time a small wrist-watch of a quite modern type. But it was a great wrench. In parting with my big, clumsy, well-worn 'turnip', I felt just as though I were parting with a dear old friend . . .

Birdie saw me off at the station. I quickly dumped my modest luggage in a third-class compartment and then went back to the platform. I can't bear those tiresome minutes on the platform just before the train leaves, which are too long for saying good-bye and too short for saying anything sensible! At that moment I particularly hated them. I was going to St. Petersburg. I was yearning with all my heart and soul to get there. I was all on fire with impatience and counting the moments that separated me from the goal of my dreams. . . .

But at last the third bell sounded. I gave Birdie a hasty kiss and jumped on to the platform of the coach, where I anxiously waited for the conductor's whistle. . . . A moment. . . . Another . . .

There was a clatter of brakes . . . a jerk . . . and the train slowly, as though unwilling, moved along the platform . . . Birdie waved her handkerchief . . . I waved my student's cap. . . .

In the compartment with me there was a little old man with a grey beard, gentle movements, and a majestic face, who somehow reminded me of the Masonic leader Bazdeyev in *War and Peace*, who converted Pierre Bezukhov to his belief. The old fellow adopted a kindly, patronizing tone towards me and asked: "Have you thought about the meaning of life, young man?"

And as I did not display a great interest in the subject, he went on reproachfully: "Oh yes, they're all like that: while they're young, they

don't give the matter a thought, and when they get old, it's too late to think about it. . . . Life has gone by—you can't re-make it."

I remained indifferent to this admonition as well. All my thoughts and feelings were busy with something quite different.

I lay down early to sleep in the upper berth. And although I usually slept like a log, even on bare boards, I now kept waking up during the night and looking impatiently at the dial of my new nickel watch. I got up with the first rays of the sun, dressed, washed, and went out on to the platform of the coach. It was early autumn, but the grass and trees were still green, and the air still preserved the fragrance of late summer. Rumbling and creaking, the train rolled on unhurriedly at a speed of thirty versts an hour. Meadows, fields, woods, greyish-blue lakes, sleepy stations, and yellow signal-boxes glided past. At Liuban I got out and had tea in the refreshment room. Then I went back into the carriage and stood a long time at the window, looking fixedly at the distance rushing towards me. I thought of St. Petersburg, imagining the bustle at the Nikolayevsky Station, the cabman, Vassilevsky Ostrov, Devyataya Liniya, Natasha, for I was determined to go straight from the train to the Korolevs.

The sun rose higher and higher. It was going to be a glorious day. The gates of a new life were opening wide before me.

And when on the distant horizon appeared scores of factory chimneys belching dark columns of smoke, when the sun gleamed on the golden dome of St. Isaac's and the hot breath of the capital struck me in the face, it was as if the thoughts, feelings, seekings, hopes, and expectations which during so many years had perturbed and worried me, had all arranged themselves in order in my head and now suddenly of their own accord formulated the all-answering conclusion.

'I must join in the workers' movement.'

Winter, 1939-40.
LONDON.

